THE

Fast of St. Magdalen,

A ROMANCE.

BY

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———— ' Thou shalt leave
Each thing beloved most dearly: 'tis the last shaft
Shot from the bow of exile.' CARY'S DANTE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE

FAST OF ST. MAGDALEN.

CHAPTER I.

At the close of the year 1508, a small Pisan town in the Appenines was stormed and taken by the Florentines.

The assault had been made at midnight; and the confusion of darkness was thus added to the customary horrors of war.

To the continued roar of artillery (reverberated by mountain echoes) succeeded the less deafening, but more dreadful sounds of the rush of troops, the clamour of pursuit, and the cry of quarter!

Along streets, slippery with blood, were heard the frequent imprecations of ferocious soldiers, as they stumbled over the dead, or received musquet wounds, from the few desperate inhabitants, who yet maintained a straggling fire from their windows.

At intervals, sudden flames were seen to blaze up from the fall of combustible materials in the burning houses, making visible the awful contrast of the tranquil surrounding Appenines, and lighting the armed ruffian to his prey, as he followed in haste and uncertainty, to plunder or violence.

Prayers, curses, shouts; the strife of men and the struggles of women; the thrust of daggers and the report of pistols; were heard at the entrance of every place, where affection or avarice had hoarded its treasures.

In vain were the images of a dying Saviour held up before the lawless multitude, by the monks of Spirito Santo:

their worshipped emblems were trampled under foot; their monastery itself forced and entered.

While the Florentine commander beheld these outrages with indifference, one of his coadjutors, whose helmet had fallen in the combat, and whose blanched cheek betrayed his loss of blood, was running from street to street, calling loudly on the troops to spare the town and its inhabitants.

A rumour reached him, that some of the soldiers had broken down the gates of the Spirito Santo, and that a woman of desperate courage was opposing herself to their entrance. Certain that not even Amazonian habits could long resist, or heroic spirit awe an unbridled crowd, he flew to the monastery, and "sending his voice before him as he flew," made the human tide pause for a moment.

"Valombrosa!" was repeated by several voices at the same instant, with different expression. Some exclaimed it

with vexation, others with insolent disregard; a few with servile fear; but the greatest number echoed it with enthusiasm. The young leader to whom that name belonged, pressed onwards with his whole excited soul in his looks. Having caught a glimpse of a woman's white garments beyond the throng of plunderers, he called on them again to give way; but his words were uttered to worse than roaring elements, and he suddenly stopped. Unloosing his jewelled baldric he threw it amongst them; and the costly ornament instantly occasioning a struggle for its possession, left the object Valombrosa sought to succour, free to fly. But instead of flying, she cast herself on her knees, in an attitude of supplication; extending her arms as if she would fain bar all entrance through the open gates.

Unconscious that his own figure appeared like that of some Archangel, beaming war and mercy from the same brow,

Valombrosa gazed astonished on that of the suppliant.

It was not an armed and fierce Amazon he beheld; it was a trembling woman of exquisite beauty, in whose looks and action, nothing was visible but tenderness and terror.

Pale as moonlight, her upraised face was distinctly marked by the wild brightness of dark imploring eyes, and by a quantity of yet darker hair, which fell dishevelled over her neck and shoulders. Her lips moved in agony, but they could not articulate a sound. As Valombrosa, recovering from his surprise, was advancing towards her, an old man in a military habit, suddenly appeared from the inner court, and called out, "Ippolita!" The lady turned eagerly round, and Valombrosa observed an instantaneous change in the expression of her eyes, as this person made the sign of the cross, twice upon his breast: the next moment she raised

those eloquent eyes to Heaven, then closing them, fell back insensible.

The veteran soldier rather flung his sword towards Valombrosa than delivered it up; but the assurance that she was his daughter, might have excused this informality to a less compassionate heart.

Valombrosa assisted the old man in raising her from the ground; then addressing a few words of intreaty and command to the soldiers, he succeeded in prevailing upon them to respect the sanctuary of their religion.

When the outer gates were closed, he entered the monastery: Valombrosa soon perceived, from the unsteady steps of his companion, and the appearance of blood oozing through his doublet, that he was ill able to bear even the light weight of a fainting woman; with a courteous action therefore he transferred her to his own arms; soothing the alarmed monks whom he met as they went along, with assurances of his ability to protect them.

After reaching the parlour of the monastery, Valombrosa laid the lady upon some rushes which one of the lay brothers had gathered into a heap from the floor; and recommending every inhabitant of the house to remain within the walls, till he could return and say the troops were gone to their quarters, he quitted the apartment.

He turned back on the threshold, with a cheering look of graciousness, and returned the conquered sword to its owner; the old warrior kissed the hand which extended it, whispering, "I am still your prisoner, generous Sir, but I have bled in many battles; I know, therefore, the death-wound when it comes—my sentence is here!" laying his hand upon his side; "as for my poor Ippolita she will remain your prisoner; and I shall die in peace; others will live in peace, when they hear that she is fallen into such noble hands. For the sake of Jesu then, return and succour her!"

Valombrosa was not slow in assuring the agitated father that he would honour the trust thus affectingly reposed in him; and he added the hope that his venerable prisoner would yet live to fight in happier fields. Then casting a compassionate glance towards the unconscious daughter, he hastened away on a wider errand of mercy.

Young as he was, Valombrosa's rank and character gave him something like authority over the Florentine general; who was, in truth, only one of those hireling commanders whose sword might be bought by any warring state.

Torelli (so the general was called) was rather pitiless than blood-thirsty; and the same apathy which enabled him to look coolly upon the carnage of the assault, made him yield to that importunate petition which urged him to stop the enormities of his soldiers.

An order to that effect was speedily

issued: Valombrosa hastened to enforce it, and to see it obeyed.

Rapid as light, and scorning alike danger and insult, he penetrated every where; forcing or persuading the marauder to desist, and restoring the scattered inhabitants to their homes.

It was not till he had seen discipline re-established, and tranquillity beginning, that he felt the pain of his own wounds. But what mattered it to Valombrosa that the blood had already welled through the ineffectual bandages with which in the middle of the combat, his surgeon had hastily staunched them? There was still another office of humanity to perform; and applying the folds of his scarf to his principal wound, he hurried back to the monastery of Spirito Santo.

The silence and solitariness of the streets through which he returned, powerfully struck him: for the same objects which he had passed unnoticed, during the confusion of his forcible entrance

into the town, now pressed upon his senses with painful distinctness.

The many fires which had then blazed in different quarters, were either quite extinguished, or sullenly smouldering. Some of the half-demolished houses were wholly untenanted; others, covered with equal darkness, only gave testimony of being inhabited, by sounds of mourning from within. The streets, strewed with dead bodies, presented here and there a solitary wretch seeking the corse of some beloved relative: seeking it by the sickly light of a taper, which was blown out in terror on the hasty tread of a passenger.

Horror and carnage had ceased, but lamentation and desolation were every where: and Valombrosa, though believing in the justice of the cause he fought for, lingered as he went, to groan over the necessity of war, and the sufferings of humanity.

He had been three hours employed in reducing the troops to order; and his

strength, diminished by previous fatigue and loss of blood, was now fairly exhausted. The keen air of the season, and of those high regions, for it was winter, sharpened the anguish of his wounds: he found his sight getting dim, and his powers failing: in short he reached the gates of the Spirito Santo, he scarcely knew how, and rather staggered than walked into the prior's parlour.

The parlour was vacant: Valombrosa threw himself upon a bench, unable to proceed. A single lamp burning near an hour-glass on the table, showed him the deserted heap of rushes, where Ippolita had been placed by himself. Where was she now?—had she feared to trust his looks and his word, and taken the opportunity of his absence to escape? Had the mere length of that absence obliged her to seek a new protector? or had she been seized and carried off by some ruffian?

That she was singularly beautiful, Va-

lombrosa felt certain, yet he had but a confused impression of her features. He remembered only her white arms scattering her disordered hair; her beseeching eyes fixed upon his; and that expression of intense agony in her face and attitude, which knocked at his inmost heart. In his breast she had awakened only the hallowed sentiments of pity and respect, and zeal to serve; in those of others, her beauty and helplessness might excite the basest passions!

These were the thoughts of a moment. Valombrosa was not of a nature to bear suspense; and rousing his fainting powers, he was endeavouring to go in search of some of the brotherhood, when the sound of a passing bell startled and stopped him.

The next instant a monk appeared; to Valombrosa's eager question, he replied, that Signor Martello (the father of Ippolita) was then expiring in one of the cells; that extreme unction had just

been administered; and that he had frequently asked for the generous Florentine who had protected his daughter.

Humanely anxious to afford every possible consolation to a dying man, Valombrosa would not yield to the suffering which was unnerving himself; he therefore bade the monk lead on.

Having passed through a long stone passage, into which several cells opened, they entered that containing him they sought. The scattered light of two or three tapers, held by persons about, threw unsteady gleams over the changed countenance of the dying man. He lay along a rude pallet, his head pillowed on the arm of Ippolita who knelt beside him: her face was hid in his bosom.

On seeing Valombrosa enter, a flush of joy was visible in Martello's features; the attempt which he made to move, caused Ippolita to raise her head, and her expressive eyes speaking through tears, met and fixed those of Valombrosa.

The latter advanced quickly, but with a soft step, and took the hand of the expiring soldier. Martello returned his pressure with a feeble grasp: he looked wistfully in the young Florentine's face and tried to speak; the effort however was vain, he sighed, and sunk back upon the arm of Ippolita. Unusually affected, Valombrosa bent his suffused eyes downwards, while assuring the veteran, that he would consider his daughter as a sacred deposit; that the republic warred not with women; and that he would therefore engage either to deliver the lady into any hands she might hereafter appoint, or he would conduct her to his sister at Florence, from whom she might be certain of honourable and affectionate treatment. He concluded this assurance, by kissing the hilt of his sword.

Martello squeezed his hand again; at the same instant a noise of boisterous voices was heard in the passage. Valombrosa hurried out to rebuke the in-

truders. He returned with the unwelcome information, that a party of officers of Stradiotto, had been quartered upon the monastery, and were come to claim the privileges of their billets. The painful change which took place in the countenance of Martello and of Ippolita required no interpreter. Valombrosa briefly asked the former, whether it were his wish that his daughter should be removed from the neighbourhood of such licentious companions, when Providence should have left her without other protection than him, who again repeated the vow, to afford it to the utmost of his power.

Martello bowed his head. Ippolita, nearly choaked by her tears, vehemently sobbed out, " Oh, dear father! it is for us you die! and shall I desert you."

The prior now drew near the bed, and directing a glance of deep meaning, alternately to the parent and child; he said, " an arrow's flight from the point of Monte Agnano, among solitudes little known,

stands the hermitage of Santa Anna: the holy woman who dwells there, will receive this poor virgin. Brother! when thy spirit has left its sinful flesh, shall she not seek shelter there?"

Ippolita eagerly kissed the garment of the aged prior. "Father, I bless thee for that thought! but this honoured —" her eyes finished the sad sentence, as they rested with a look of unutterable anguish upon the figure of Martello.

His wan cheek beamed for a moment with satisfaction: again he bowed his head in token of approval, and motioned with his feeble hand for her to be gone.

Convulsed with sudden emotion, Ippolita flung her arms round his neck: long did she hang there sobbing and speechless! so long indeed, that his last faint sigh was mixed and lost in her bursts of grief.

The complete stillness which then succeeded in the body of Martello, to its former tremulous movements, made the

few surrounding monks very soon aware of his death, and considerately beckoning Valombrosa to accompany them, they severally glided from the cell; leaving the yet unconscious mourner, to the pious consolations of their superior.

The riotous demands of his military associates, who were vociferously calling for more refreshment from the distant refectory, were unheard by Valombrosa, as he trod the cloisters in awe-struck silence. The past scene weighed upon his heart, oppressing it to pain, and urging on him such a throng of serious reflections, that it was long before he attended to the repeated questions of a monk by his side, who observed with uneasiness the ineffectual bandages of his wound.

Valombrosa at length recalled to himself, thankfully accepted this brother's offer of assistance, and turned with him into the surgery of the monastery.

His other companions hastened to

satisfy their new inmates, and to silence those irreverent songs, which already began to echo through cloisters sacred to religious praise, and now about to answer to requiems for the dead.

A skilful outward application, and a reviving inward cordial, administered by his pious friend, was not long in producing beneficial effect upon the sensations of Valombrosa; so that he was shortly able to join his brother officers, and exhort them to respect the sacred dwelling and profession of their entertainers. From their lawless board he was relieved by a summons to a private conference with the prior.

In this interview, the good man questioned him on his name and family, and his intentions towards the unfortunate lady whom the chance of war had thus thrown upon his humanity.

Valombrosa's frank and generous replies, left anxiety nothing further to learn and little to apprehend: he repeated his

offer of immediately consigning the Signora into any other protection; or if her friends were too distant for that, to carry her to Florence and place her with his sister, till she could apprise them where to claim her. In the meanwhile he was ready to attend her instantly to the Hermitage of Santa Anna, accompanied by any one of the monks whom the prior might choose to appoint.

The prior had lived in the world before he devoted himself to heaven, and he never removed his eyes from the young soldier's face during their interesting discourse; his scrutiny was satisfactory; he detected nothing on the ingenuous brow of Valombrosa, which contradicted his tongue; he saw there, only pure benevolence, ardent zeal, and generous compassion.

The worthy father believed that the same impulse would have been felt by the same heart on a similar occasion, even had Ippolita's tears flowed over the

homeliest cheeks: — and thus believing, he was satisfied to trust her in his hands.

Night was by this time far spent, the late dawn would soon break; Valombrosa therefore hinted the expediency of seizing that calm hour, for conducting Ippolita to the hermitage.

Acquiescing in this suggestion, the prior went to communicate the substance of their conference to the mourner, whom he had left at her own request, alone in the chamber of death.

It was long ere he re-appeared; when he did, Ippolita came with him.

Her veil was down; she did not remove it when she entered, though she extended her hand, and gave it to Valombrosa; he kissed it respectfully without speaking; for her silent sorrow imposed restraint upon the expression of the pity she inspired.

One of the younger brethren charged with the office of conducting them to

Monte D'Agnano, was now beside her; the prior led the way to the outer court.

As they cautiously trod the less frequented passages leading to the gates which opened on the country, he spoke to her in a low voice, and talked of peace and profitable suffering. Ippolita listened in silence, now and then stopping, and casting behind her a look full of anguish.

At the last court, she paused, fixing her eyes earnestly upon the grey walls of the monastery, then beginning to redden with the reflection of the eastern clouds. She sighed more than once, and that so deeply, that even her sobs in the death-chamber, had not sounded sadder; but suddenly checking herself, she exclaimed, "Yet, I have much to be grateful for — *much* I hope, still left!" As she broke off, she bent her knee to the prior, who giving her his benediction, dismissed her with an anxious heart, into a world of trial and temptation.

CHAPTER II.

Closely shrouded in her veil and mantle, Ippolita walked with an unsteady step between her two protectors.

Dawn glimmered faintly; yet not so faintly as might have prevented her from seeing melancholy traces of the midnight strife. The crimson stones she trod on, the livid heaps of slain which occasionally obstructed their path, now and then surprised her into a thrilling cry, or an audible shudder: the monk crossed himself at every new horror; and Valombrosa with unusual emotion, wondered how any motive could sanctify bloodshed.

Here and there they passed a camp-follower, employed in rifling the dead;

and at these moments, Valombrosa's stern mandate to forbear, was followed by instant obedience. In crossing a narrow outlet towards the mountains, he observed a single body stretched upon the ground. Life had issued there, "at a thousand gaping wounds;" for the grass around, was reddened in as many channels. The gleam of daylight shone upon some jewels about the breast of the fallen warrior, discovering at the same time a dog which lay moaning at his dead master's feet. The eye of a straggling plunderer fell on them at the same instant, and contesting the possession of the body with the faithful animal, was just raising the butt end of his trombone, to knock out the brains of the dog, when Valombrosa, transported beyond himself, sprung forward, and felled the ruffian to the earth.

"Wretch!" he exclaimed, his eyes striking fire. Ippolita, who had hastily withdrawn her veil at this exclamation, caught a glimpse of the dead person;

she ran wildly forward, and throwing herself upon the body, pushed away the feathered hat which concealed the face. The sight reassured her; some indistinct words of thankfulness escaped her lips; then rising, and shrinking with a troubled air from the fixed enquiry of Valombrosa's eyes, she turned tremblingly away.

Whatever might be her own anxieties, Ippolita's heart never shut out pity for others: even now, though bowed down with sorrow for the loss of one honoured protector, and racked with fears for another, she could not leave the remains of a fellow-creature to possible indignity, and their mute defender to destruction, without expressing painful regret.

"Then my feelings are warranted by yours, Signora," said Valombrosa, the pleasure of generous sympathy brightening his eyes. "Go on, good Father; I will but see this poor animal, and the

body he protects, placed beyond further outrage, and overtake you on the instant. — Yon flying dastard! — but that my time is precious —" his indignant glance finished the imperfect sentence.

Still flaming with noble anger, he called loudly on the Florentine guard, which had replaced that of the Pisans in the town; and while he remained to witness the transfer of the corse to his own quarters, and to see that no unfeeling sport was made with its humble guardian, Ippolita fearfully pursued her way; — pursued it in the midst of other thoughts; — thoughts of distressing interest.

How strangely were frailty and nobleness mixed in her young protector! she saw, or fancied she saw, that he was a being of impulse; for how imprudent was the blow, which had it been desperately returned, might have deprived him of life, and left her to greater horrors than those he had rescued her from!

the same humanity, more temperately displayed, would have attained its object as surely, without incurring the risk of provoking the offender to assault in self-defence.

Yet, to her gentle nature, which sympathised even with the limited suffering of what we call irrational creatures; to her, the impulse, all headlong as it was, and coupled with passion, was admirable and endearing.

Hastening onward, though with a fluctuating pace, the monk and the Signora were overtaken by Valombrosa, ere they had ascended the first stage of the mountain: his humane task was happily accomplished; and the lightning of anger in his eyes, had given place to a sweet heaviness, expressive of thought and tender commiseration.

Soothed by his sympathising manner, Ippolita was gradually won to answer and to inquire: and though tears often interrupted her speech with bitter recol-

lection of the lamented remains she was forced to abandon, yet some other strong interest evidently shared her heart, and made her anxious to learn particulars of the prisoners taken in the town and its outskirts.

Their way led over precipitous goat-tracks, across steeps as bleak as barren; then they struck into an extensive pine wood, where a chilling thaw was dripping from every tree. The risen sun shot brightly, but not warmly, through the dark umbrage, vainly striving to pierce the thick mists, which in masses almost tangible, filled the space between the ground and the branches of the trees.

As far as the eye could reach, mountain rose above mountain, through this sea of vapour, their pinnacles alternately louring in gloom or dazzling with sunbeams; while deep below, every object lay buried under billows of mist.

The monk, having preceded his com-

panions in ascending a very steep path, led the way down the opposite declivity, whence suddenly plunging into a ravine overhung with gigantic cedars, he proceeded, gradually descending under increasing shade, till almost total darkness enveloped them, and the very heavens were excluded by the umbrageous roof above.

Valombrosa and Ippolita, though walking close together, could no longer see each other distinctly; they were therefore obliged to trust to the sound of their conductor's feet for directions where to follow: but soon even that distinct sound was lost in the noise of a torrent dashing through a neighbouring chasm, and all then became doubt and danger.

The sullen splash of the water, the icy drip of the trees, the darkness and dreariness of the place, thrilled Ippolita with unusual dread: she drew closer to Valombrosa, and for the first time grasped his arm.

He sought to re-assure her: the silver tones of his voice were rendered more striking by the silence and darkness around; and their mere sweetness was tranquillizing.

Ippolita recovered from her momentary weakness with a stifled sigh, adding, "I was fancying the horror of being here alone at midnight—the certainty of being lost without a guide."

Valombrosa joined in the truth of the last remark; little aware that even this savage solitude was associated with the object of her chief anxiety, and that his assent to her opinion was fatal to her composure.

"We are not far from Santa Anna now," said the monk, stopping till they came up with him. "This dismal pass may be likened to our path of life—dark, dangerous, and wearisome: but heaven will open on us beyond."

Ippolita folded her hands over her breast with chastised feelings; and in that

humble attitude resumed her interrupted progress.

The ravine seemed to have no outlet, for on reaching the extremity of its steep descent, a mass of tangled thickets and jutting rocks, apparently barred all egress; but the monk laboriously pulling aside some huge boughs of ancient larch, discovered a concealed and narrow passage, and calling on his companions to follow, they passed singly, and with difficulty, through pendant underwood and forked blocks of granite.

The heavy trees swaying back when they were through, closed up the pass.

Every thing was changed! Ippolita and Valombrosa stood enchanted: the broad bosom of a lower mountain spread before them, liberal of beauty and sunshine. All the glories of morning were poured upon thickets of holly and arbutus, green as spring, and glittering with dew. Near a small lake fringed with the hardy

verdure of arborescent heaths, stood the hermitage of Santa Anna.

It was rudely built of stone, but the contrasted forms of the spiral and spreading trees around it, grouped well with its low, irregular figure, and with the rough-hewn cross by which it was surmounted.

Long exposure to the air, by producing a soft brown tint, had mellowed the glaring whiteness of the stone, into harmony with the surrounding objects; and now the increase of mosses and weather stains upon the fractured surface of the building, threatened soon to blend it entirely with the darker shades of the back-ground.

Wreaths of smoke ascending from the solitary chimney, and the grateful smell of burning rosebay issuing from the entrance, spoke of comfort and warmth within; yet Ippolita when they reached the threshold, held back on the arm

of Valombrosa, and motioned for the monk to enter alone.

Valombrosa felt her tremble, as she leaned upon him, and he would have impelled her forward, but she withheld him.

The monk re-appeared; "be of good cheer, daughter!" he said, and motioned her to advance.

Ippolita's raised eye uttered the thanksgiving she did not articulate; and no longer hesitating, she followed her guide.

Formless seats of wood, with a block of mountain marble for a table, an hour-glass, a crucifix, and the image of the patron saint, furnished the single apartment. Its inhabitant, a woman of severe piety, smiled not like her blazing fire, but she welcomed Ippolita with serious earnestness; assuring her, that protected by the Virgin and Santa Anna, her solitary abode had never, during twenty years, been invaded either by ruffian or savage beast.

The pious woman added something else in a low voice; but as it was addressed solely to Ippolita, Valombrosa delicately removed himself from their side: he guessed, however, that what she said, was of a consoling import, for it gave sudden illumination to the Signora's melancholy aspect.

After a short interval of rest, the monk unloosed from his shoulders a little wallet of better provisions than his fair charge was likely to find at Santa Anna, and called on Valombrosa to return.

The latter unwillingly rose to obey his summons; for he shrunk from leaving his lovely companion in such defenceless seclusion, and he fancied that her suddenly altered look betrayed similar apprehension.

During their walk, he had enquired her wishes for the future; and finding her still inclined to follow the advice of the prior, he had undertaken to attend her to Florence, the moment the com-

mander would sanction his absence. He now, therefore, renewed his engagement, earnestly beseeching the charitable recluse to guard the Signora from the sight of any possible intruder, assuring her that he would press his return to claim her, with all the zeal of anxiety.

In losing sight of Valombrosa, Ippolita felt as if her last prop were departing from her: but when she recollected that, not twelve hours before, his very person was unknown to her; when she recalled the death of her last protector, the tumultuous distraction which had preceded it, the anguish and uncertainty which had followed; when she thought of what she might find in Florence, (Florence, the source and scene of horrors in which all most dear to her had once been involved,) when she imaged possible events fatal to herself and to others, she was ready to exclaim, "here rather let me live — here die."

But other reasonings convinced, other motives influenced; and with a smothered sigh, she echoed Valombrosa's parting assurance, that they should soon meet again.

The latter returned her an inspiriting smile; then bidding the monk lead on, was speedily lost with him, among the dark recesses of the ravine.

CHAPTER III.

It may now be proper to inquire into the history of Ippolita's preserver.

A second son of Torquato Marquis Valombrosa, Orlando Valori, was early devoted to the profession of arms; therefore passed the first years of his youth, among camps and fortresses. Educated in his native city, during the last brilliant days of Lorenzo the Magnificent, and so familiarised with the newly-discovered stores of Greek and Roman literature, he carried into warlike scenes, not merely an ardour for military renown, but the admiration and emulation of intellectual excellence.

The Valori family next in power and wealth to that of the Medici, were

strongly attached to the person of Lorenzo, then nominally the first citizen of the Republic; but, in reality, its wise, powerful, and beneficent sovereign.

During the short administration of Piero, Lorenzo's son and successor, the attachment of the Valori was wearied out by the new ruler's imprudent display of authority; and the sword of Torquato was finally among the first that barred Piero's entrance to the hall of legislation.

After the expulsion of the Medici, and the restoration of a popular government, Torquato filled several important offices: distinguishing himself by inflexible, almost severe, justice; by a disregard of reward, more proudly shown than calmly felt; and by an ostentation of disinterestedness in the discharge of his civic duty.

This ungracious character, rendered still less amiable by manners as austere in private as in public life, made him rather an object of respect and fear to his do-

mestic circle, than of its affection and confidence. His Marchioness, a Tyrolese lady, of higher birth than fortune, even from the first days of their union seemed unable to resist the chilling effect of such a partner; it was said indeed, that obliged to accept his hand when her vows were given to another, she could never overcome her subsequent remorse. Be that as it might, though she certainly loved her children and reverenced her lord, she had not strength of mind sufficient to rouse herself from those habits of melancholy and listlessness, which gradually grew upon her youth; but as she preserved her exquisite beauty through the twenty-one years of their union, and as her husband considered women's minds with perfect contempt, her unsocial sadness threw a cloud over the youthful spirits of her children only.

Depressed by his mother's habitual dejection, and his father's severity, the animated Orlando was inwardly glad that

his order of birth allowed him the cheerful refuge of a camp; while his brother, in right of seniority, was condemned to the withering influence of their splendid but joyless home.

Lucio Valori was well suited to such a situation, for being the only child of a former marriage, the languor of the present Marchioness gave him no concern; and the sterner parts of his father's character found exaggerated sympathy in his.

Without any of the weaknesses of youth, or any of its grosser inclinations, Lucio neither created solicitude in his friends nor contempt in his enemies. One or two malignant passions however, secretly possessed him; and had length of days been allotted him, he might have blotted the page of Italian history with crimes commensurate to its many horrors.

But his life was short: death entered the house of Valori, a true king of terrors; and in one short twelvemonth, but two

of its members, and they the youngest, were left.

Clemenza the eldest daughter of the Marquis, had died in the spring of life, of a malignant fever: but it was not till two years afterwards, that the disastrous destiny of the family might be said to commence.

At the beginning of 1504, the Marchioness Valombrosa perished by the fumes of charcoal, at one of her husband's residences in the Casentino. The ignorance or negligence of her woman, had not foreseen the deadly effect of such vapours in a room from which the outward air was entirely excluded; and no opening having been left, the unhappy lady was found lifeless in the morning. Ten months afterwards, the Marquis and his eldest son travelling to Rome, too thinly attended, were attacked among the mountains of the Bolognese, overpowered, and murdered.

This event following so closely upon the sad fate of her mother, fell with disastrous weight upon the delicate frame of Rosalia, the remaining daughter.

From infancy she had appeared of so susceptible a temperament, that proper care at length degenerated into weak indulgence; and her infirm constitution was solicitously spared, rather than judiciously exercised.

The keenest sensibilities even in childhood, sensibilities unhappily fostered by her mother's melancholy humour, shook her fragile nerves almost to destruction. The fever that carried off Clemenza had seized upon the feebler frame of Rosalia with frightful violence; and though it spared her life, entailed upon her an epileptic affection, which at first threatened her immediate dissolution, then menaced her intellects, and sparing them, finally terminated; but not without leaving a mark, which rendered her still more the object of affectionate solicitude.

The successive deaths of her mother, father and brother, renewed for a time, those alarming convulsions: so that it required all the tenderness and attention of her only surviving guardian, to restore her mind and nerves to a comparatively healthy state.

Become Marquis of Valombrosa by the deaths of his father and Lucio, Orlando hastened from San Vicenza where he was on service, to take possession of his estates, and to comfort his sister.

Having procured for her the protection of an excellent woman whom benevolent inclination, rather than necessity, induced to fill the place of his mother in their domestic circle, he preferred keeping this dear and unfortunate sister within the reach of his own fostering care, to placing her in the dreary society of a convent. Rosalia therefore remained in her brother's house: growing into youth from childhood; gradually becoming less pensive; less solitary; less suffering; inter-

festing his heart, and winding herself closely there, with all its dearest thoughts. It seems as if our affection for any object increases in proportion to the number or degree of the virtuous feelings which it calls into exercise: we are therefore accustomed to love most tenderly the being for whom we have most suffered or struggled. Thus Valombrosa, hourly called upon for pity and forbearance, and watchful attendance, by the helpless state of Rosalia, attached himself to her, with a fervor and tenderness rarely felt.

A great command of money enabled him to procure for her the advice of the celebrated physicians of other countries as well as those of his own; and he had at length the joy of hearing from one of the most experienced, that *if* her heart could be guarded from any new shock, her constitution would finally fix in comparative strength.

Human means could not ward off calamity; but Valombrosa resolved, that

whatever he might be destined to suffer, no sorrow should be inflicted by his conduct, nor should any of his selfish anxieties be communicated to her.

Present griefs, however, Valombrosa had none: for the late disasters did not long press upon the elastic spirit of youth; and he had lived too little at home since he was a child, to remember the relations now torn from it, with circumstances of peculiar endearment.

Whenever he returned to Florence, after a campaign, his heart used to find no fellowship with those of his father and brother. His eldest sister was receiving her education at a convent; and his mother sunk in a mournful apathy, for which he knew no sufficient cause. But the gentle creature he knew best, therefore loved most; she whose apartment had been his real home, while all else in the Palazzo Valombrosa was alien to him, was his sister Rosalia; her he retained,

and he blest: could he then be otherwise than gratefully happy!

Exactly four years had intervened between the death of the last Marquis, and the period in which this history commences, and Valombrosa's character had risen cheeringly above the oppression of family disasters.

His palace in Florence, and his villas in its vicinity, began to rival the fame of those in the age just preceding; equalling them in the decorations of taste and magnificence, in the treasures of art and science, in the throng of learned men who sought Valombrosa's patronage: surpassing them in the ease, freedom, and animation, which his gaily-ingenuous character imparted to social meetings.

His time of life precluding him from filling any public station of dignity commensurate with his rank, Valombrosa gave himself up to the enjoyment of society: thus enriching his mind, even more by conversation than by books, and

rather cultivating the social regard of his compatriots, than exasperating their envy.

Perhaps no man had more friends and fewer enemies: for his fine qualities were not without alloy; and his associates, remembering that he now and then sunk beneath their level of prudence and command of temper, forgave his excelling them in generosity and temperance.

At four-and-twenty, (that charming age when youth breaks into manhood, and the greatest indiscretions find perhaps too ready an excuse in the ardour of the blood!) Valombrosa's character certainly displayed the faults of his age; but these were really overbalanced by a far larger proportion of amiable and estimable properties.

Frank, true, and unsuspicious; firm as warm in friendship; with large and liberal views of his duties as a patriot and a patron; rightly understanding the best and most splendid means of exalting the

nobility of his name; respectful to age and misfortune; prompt to pity; eager to redress wrong as to forgive injury; easily convinced of error; prouder of unsullied family honour than of family antiquity; kind nearly to excess to those beneath him; and attached to his kindred with the tenderest affection.

Among his faults might be numbered credulity, rash judgments, aversion to deep investigations, and a deficiency of that mental courage without which all our virtues, are built on sand. His temper, which carried anger, as the flint doth fire, had never received any check from himself nor others: for if it lightened through his social circle, the storm was so brief, and such enchanting sunshine succeeded, that his companions thought only of enjoying the present brightness; and if it gathered over a domestic, such a shower of bounties and favours, almost immediately fell from the same cloud,

that gratitude or self-interest, or indulgent partiality, stifled complaint.

Valombrosa's engaging physiognomy developed this character to the most careless observer, for its rapid changes were true to every variety of his feelings, or his fancy. Ardour was perhaps its chief characteristic; yet only strangers thought so: for in the sweet every-day of home, his heart and his eyes overflowed with tenderness.

Every one that had seen Valombrosa, called him singularly handsome; yet when they tried to ascertain the precise grounds for such an assertion, they could not recollect them.

A graceful manliness of figure, and an expressive countenance; an air of nobleness; and a voice to which he could give the music of every tender or powerful passion, made him *become his quality*. Thus accomplished, amiable, young and rich, the women of course decreed him all the honours of an Apollo.

After succeeding to the estates of his father, Valombrosa's military habits were for a long time disused. Intent upon pouring his wealth into the best channels, and upon making Florence again the seat of the fine arts, he forgot for awhile his first passion, the love of arms.

In truth, no very important field of action for some time invited: for the Republic cautiously stood aloof, while successively the Bolognese was contested by the Pope and the Bentivoglio; and the Venetian power was struggling against the united strength of the Holy See, of France, and the Empire.

Florence employed her troops solely in her domestic quarrel with the Pisans; and though the revolt of that people from her authority, had been successfully maintained above fourteen years, she hoped to find the present opportunity favourable for crushing them: they were left alone; nearly all the rest of Italy were engaged in their own particular

wars, therefore unable to assist the rebel state.

One of the towns belonging to Pisa, in the Appenines, having been well fortified, became a sort of hiding place for armed adventurers, whence they issued forth into the territory of the Florentines, wasting and plundering at will. The band was commanded by a Pisan general of great estimation, and the devastation consequently made on the lands of the Republic, called on its legislature to reduce the rebel strong-hold without loss of time.

Having determined in council, on the surprise of this fortress, an efficient body of foreign troops, principally officered by the young nobility of Florence, was ordered upon the service; and Valombrosa, though unwilling to agitate his sister, found his honour too loudly called upon, for him to delay joining their standard.

The surprise and capture of the town

have been already related. Valombrosa bravely distinguished himself; and yet more nobly in the merciful part which followed.

After the reduction of the place, the commission of volunteers ceased, consequently Valombrosa, when he repaired a second time to the quarters of the general, obtained his immediate sanction to return home. He then lost no time in providing for the conveyance of Ippolita from Santa Anna; and leaving no other office of humanity unfulfilled, hastened to claim her the second morning after the capture of the town.

As he went along, Valombrosa's thoughts naturally dwelt upon the person he was about to take charge of; and he beguiled the way, by conjecturing her character and situation.

Her air and manner, he decided, might grace the highest nobility; but it was no less certain, she was not born in that

rank which could entitle her to domesticate with the sister of the Marquis Valombrosa.

Her father, so the prior said, and so indeed he seemed, had been an officer of no note; the rest of her relations were persons of broken fortunes, scattered over different states. What would the world say, were Valombrosa to place such a person, however amiable and unfortunate, upon a level with the Signora Rosalia Valori!

Why, say what it would, the peculiar circumstances of his meeting with the distressed lady, excused him to his own heart, for any intended violation of ordinary forms: he had sworn to contribute all in his power to comfort her, and he would do so to the utmost.

He determined therefore to present her to his sister; and it would then remain with Ippolita's own sense of propriety, to conduct herself with the modesty of her

state, and to mark without abjectness, that she knew the difference between a benefactress and a familiar friend.

Having settled this point to his satisfaction, Valombrosa mused over her behaviour under her affliction. It had certainly been that of a daughter affectionately attached to the parent so cruelly torn from life; but still, it was not that of a woman from whom every thing most dear is snatched. Assuredly grief and anxiety divided her mind; nay Valombrosa even thought, that anxiety had the chief share.

There must then be some living object dearer to Ippolita than this beloved father: it could not be a mother, for the prior had spoken of the lady as an orphan. A youthful heart was not long in guessing that object to be a lover: and the conjecture so far from cooling Valombrosa's ardour to serve her, gave vigour to his generous desire of extending happiness,

and he pleased himself with thinking what joy he was thus preparing for some amiable man.

The way to Santa Anna, though obscure, was to him who had once passed it, not intricate, and Valombrosa retraced it alone at noon day without difficulty.

On reaching the hermitage, he found Ippolita gratefully willing to accept his immediate escort to Florence; and her pious protectress, though earnest in exhorting her to abjure a sinful world, was not obstinate in her attempt at detaining her.

If Valombrosa were struck by the countenance of Ippolita when he first saw it, all convulsed by terror and anguish, how much was his admiration now excited, by her altered appearance.

Sorrow indeed was heavy in her downcast eyes: but so divine an expression of submission, almost smiled upon her parted lips, that he justly believed she had known bitter trials before, and early

learned the hard, hard lesson to resign, and yet to hope.

Her dark-brown hair simply folded round her head with careless yet decent grace, marked the alabaster of her forehead, and the clearness of a cheek, which was only more transparent, not less lucidly white.

Tears hung on the long lashes that shaded her dark eyes; but they now sparkled there, like rain drops in a sunbeam.

Her beautiful proportions, her perfect features, their sublime paleness, and yet more, that air of modest dignity which distinguished her, reminded Valombrosa of the most finished models of Grecian sculpture. He looked at her Vestal beauty, perhaps too earnestly; for as her eyes encountered his, she cast them down again, with a look of disturbance.

Valombrosa recovered himself instantly: his respectful and tempered address soon re-assured her; and taking a reverential

farewell of the recluse, Ippolita at last committed herself to his sole guidance and good faith.

By Valombrosa's direction, a litter for her, and mules for himself and his attendants waited at the foot of the mountain. His arguments had prevailed on her to proceed without re-entering the town: for though he appreciated the filial sentiment which prompted her to visit the monastery of Spirito Santo; he saw so much to apprehend, from her thus renewing the recollections of that fatal night in the scene where its saddest events were acted, that he urged her not to gratify the melancholy wish.

Had Ippolita been singly to suffer from the effects of sorrow so indulged, she would not have avoided its tributary pang; but now it was become her duty not to draw unnecessarily, or selfishly, upon the sympathies of a stranger and benefactor. She therefore got into the

litter tearfully, but with a smile of pensive acknowledgment; and drawing the curtains round, withdrew herself from the eyes of Valombrosa.

CHAPTER IV.

THE short winter-day had long closed, when the travellers entered *The beautiful city*, as Florence was then called.

Its stately palaces and churches were obscured by the darkness: except here and there, where an image of the Virgin was lighted up in the streets, or some Signor proceeding to an entertainment, was preceded by the glare of torch-bearers.

Their partial illuminations, now and then brightened a ripple of the Arno, as it glided under the marble arches of the Ponta della Trinita; or glimmered like glow-worms among the lofty trees which extend their majestic avenue from the Porta Romano to the hills.

Dark as the avenues were, the squares

which the travellers crossed, were rendered more luminous and lively by groups of masked passengers, and by the sound of music within the houses. A happy heart might have listened to catch the joyous strains, or to observe the motley parties; but Valombrosa, however naturally inclined to cheerfulness, was now intent upon another's comfort, and he rode by the side of Ippolita's litter, inattentive to passing objects.

Whatever were the Signora's emotions while proceeding through the proud streets of Florence, they were not communicated to her companion; for she never moved the curtains of her litter to address him.

There was, however, a fixed seriousness in her look, when he assisted her in alighting, which showed her mind locked up in meditations deep and extraordinary: the hand she placed on his, was as much like marble to the touch, as to the eye; and when she recovered from

her abstraction, all her outward senses appeared bewildered.

Ippolita's self-possession was first restored to her, by sight of the joy which their master's safe return excited in his domestics. His kind replies to their respectful greetings, nay the very warmth of those greetings, was an additional proof of his amiable nature; and Ippolita, who loved to indulge in the grateful sentiments of admiration and affection, was pleased to find her protector's character thus consistently gracious.

Valombrosa now led her up a richly-painted staircase, through a suite of splendid galleries and saloons, where Brunelleschi's noblest conceptions of architecture, were embodied in majestic arches and colonnades of the costliest marbles.

In these stately apartments, magnificence succeeded to magnificence with such noble profusion, that even Ippolita's

occupied mind was called forth in pleased astonishment.

An excess of light reflected from large Venetian mirrors, dazzled the eye with the variety of interesting objects which were judiciously arranged, not confusedly crowded into the scene.

In this suite of rooms the productions of every distinguished age, were placed according to its order of time. The earliest specimens of art, in the remains of Egyptian and Etruscan models, were followed by those of Greece in the distinct epochas of Pericles and Alexander. Then came the works of Grecian artists under the Roman emperors: and, lastly, the productions of modern Italy; of that still-memorable period, when its genius burst forth at once, mature and perfect, like Minerva from the head of Jupiter.

On one hand Ippolita saw piles of ancient literature, either in the originals themselves, or copied from the first ma-

nuscripts: on the other she saw the printed works of later poets and historians, in all the splendour of recent gilding and illumination.

Wherever she turned, the scene was lavish of offered pleasure; and that of a pleasure which not even "the firm philosopher might scorn:" for whatever objects presented themselves, either recorded the magnificence of past ages, or showed that times present, tried to emulate the greatness of their predecessors.

This was no Sybarite abode of unmanly luxury. Here every decoration had its use, or gave its lesson. Here the noblest ornaments spoke to the noblest faculties of man; and taught a higher ambition than that of wealth or hereditary honours, the ambition of intellectual distinction.

Ippolita had heard of residences like these, when they who described them, spoke with the keen regret of Exiles;

and she unconsciously sighed in the midst of her mental ravishment.

Valombrosa believing her weary, prayed her to rest upon a couch in the last apartment, while he went to meet his sister in private, ere he should present them to each other.

His absence was not a brief one; and Ippolita's meditations received no other interruption, than what a servant gave, who came to place refreshments before her. After a courteous notice of this attention, she fell back into the trance that was upon her, when she entered Florence.

This was not a dreamless trance: visions, strange and affecting, alternately chilled or wrung her heart; till at length, the saddest of all, the untimely death of her father, terminated the chain, and her over-tasked feelings found relief in a gush of tears.

Her stormy grief had somewhat subsided, though still she wept, when the

silver sound of Valombrosa's voice without, warned her of his approach: he came, with his sister supported on his arm.

He led Rosalia forward, with the tenderest cautiousness, to the couch whence Ippolita rose to meet them.

"Give me your hand, Signora!" said a voice of kindred, yet much softer sweetness than her brother's.

Ippolita obeyed.

"Welcome! dearly welcome!" repeated the interesting young creature, pressing that hand with both her's. "Dearly welcome! since I am indebted to you for Orlando's return, and for an additional cause to love him!"

Ippolita's agitated lips silently printed her thanks upon the delicate hand which continued to hold her's. Valombrosa considerately interpreted her thoughts in words, and placed his sister upon the same seat with that to which he led back the fair orphan.

Ippolita fixed her speaking eyes upon the youthful form of Rosalia with a look so full of tender commiseration and grateful pleasure, that Valombrosa's countenance sparkled. He had praised the person while describing the character of this cherished sister, and it was delightful to read in Ippolita's eloquent look, that his enthusiasm was not exaggerated partiality.

But it was not every one who would have felt like Ippolita.

Rosalia was formed to attract, but the romantic few. She was a blighted lily; and in looking on her, the melancholy idea of decay, mingled with conjectures of what the fair flower might have been, had not untimely frost nipped its early beauty.

Her figure was little more than a graceful shadow. Her features, indeed, were interesting; but they wanted the glow of health, and the flash of vivacity. Instead of those charms natural to youth, her transparent complexion was only va-

ried by a tender pink upon her cheek, which occasionally mixing with the azure of crossing vein, produced that soft uncertainty of tint, which distinguishes the pearly colouring of Guido.

Even her profusely-long hair was in unison with the delicate fragility of her frame; it was of the colour and texture of unwrought silk.

Eyes of pale dewy light, like the star of evening; and a sighing voice like its plaintive breeze, added interest to such a form and such a complexion. The voice and the eyes united, excited ideas of another and a purer world; and they who once were touched by them, soon discovered in her mind, and person, and situation, such an affecting harmony, that they could scarcely wish that harmony destroyed, even by health and happiness.

And was not Rosalia happy?— Alas! she was blind, and she had once seen!

Those beautiful eyes which whenever she was addressed, were raised and di-

rected towards the speaker with a fullness of expression which rivetted his attention, were blanks to the possessor. They still transmitted all her feelings to others, but they no longer gave her in return the looks and feelings of her companions. Surrounded by persons dear to her heart, from the age of eleven to seventeen she had seen them only by memory, or in imagination; and she felt the breath of every changing season, without being able to fix an adoring gaze upon the endless varieties of creation.

In consequence of the nervous affection which followed the fever caught from her sister, a gutta serena had suddenly deprived her of sight, and as is customary, without impairing the appearance of the eye.

At first, Rosalia's fortitude sunk under such a misfortune; and shunning society, she gave herself up to despair. Fortunately about the period of her father's dreadful death, their family confessor

had a summons to Rome, and his place was supplied by a priest of singular probity and persuasiveness. By degrees his gentle admonitions calmed the violence of Rosalia's regret; and his enlightened piety teaching her the purpose of divine chastisements, their beneficial effects, their warning not to provoke other privations by thoughtless disregard of blessings still in possession, made her for the first time seriously endeavour to check the culpable sensibility which was gradually centering all her feelings in self.

In proportion as her brother became dearer, her anxiety not to draw down another judgment by unbridled lamentation over past misfortunes, made her cultivate every occupation which might detach her thoughts from the sad catastrophes of her relations, and reconcile her to her own personal privation. She contrived therefore, a variety of ingenious works, in which practice gave her wonderful facility: she was read to, by her

attendants; and she cultivated music with all the enthusiasm of genius.

Nature had blessed her with a most melodious voice and exquisite ear; so that she gave, and enjoyed delight, in the concerts at which her brother collected the finest performers of Italy. By degrees also, she accustomed herself to be seen in larger societies where new pleasures opened on her, in conversation various, interesting, and improving.

Her tearful eyes were no longer turned sorrowfully away, when others spoke of those productions of nature or of art which required sight to appreciate: she could now fix those angel eyes upon the speaker, with earnest attention; yet still she sighed over her blindness whenever some eminently-generous or touching sentiment was uttered by her brother, and made her long to read the accompanying expression, in his well-remembered face.

By the side of such an interesting young

creature, Ippolita could not long feel apprehension, nor indulge selfish regrets; she roused herself to hear with attention, and reply with precision, to the kind questionings of this new friend; whose manners singularly combined the *naiveté* of childhood, with the delicate tact of matured sensibility.

"I am sure I see you," said the artless Rosalia, after some hours of conversation had familiarized them. "I am sure I see you, just as you are. A voice tells me so much! — and your's is so touching! — I can tell by something in its tone, that your countenance is as full of pathos — is it not Orlando?"

Valombrosa's reply was whispered.

Ippolita's thoughts were engaged in contrasting her own lot, eventful as it was, with that of this young creature, surrounded with every outward good, but denied that sense, by which nearly all things are enjoyed; and secretly acknowledging that her destiny was therefore

preferable, she was too much absorbed to notice Rosalia's innocent question, even with a blush.

The Signora Valori mistook the cause of the sigh which escaped Ippolita in the midst of these reflections: she laid her fingers for an instant on Ippolita's cheek, to feel if it were moist; —there was a tear on it, for Ippolita's feelings were all softened, and her mind had lost its usual firmness.

"I would I could charm away your sorrow, Signora!" repeated Rosalia in a caressing accent, "to amuse you just now, is impossible; but if you love music, I can sing: and Orlando tells me that my voice is soothing."

"I feel that you do charm away many painful recollections," replied Ippolita, "and if it be right to accept your gracious offer —" her eye glanced at Valombrosa; he understood its glance, and led his sister immediately to an organ.

Ippolita admired the tender patience

with which he thus supplied, in their hours of familiar privacy, the place of his sister's usual attendants; the care with which he seated her, and directed her hands to the keys; the melancholy fondness with which he contemplated her during the performance; and the animated pleasure with which he listened to her voice.

A low, solemn strain, touched with the finest hand, preluded a hymn, such as angels might have sung at the mercy-seat.

While she sang, Rosalia's youthful face kindled into celestial brightness; and an expression of inspiration shone in the upraised fixture of her sightless eyes. Each downy fall of her voice, seemed like the softly-waving plumes of an attendant seraph; and the divine expression of all her features, completed the illusion.

Gazing, listening, with a spirit already half-divorced from earth, Ippolita for

one beatific instant believed herself in the courts of Heaven.

Valombrosa turned round, wondering that no sign of approbation proceeded from Ippolita. For the first time, he saw on her cheek a crimson richer than those rosy clouds which wait on sun-set: her soul was in her eyes, and they were intently fixed upon Rosalia. He looked at her with silent admiration; Rosalia ceased: Ippolita shuddered; and withdrawing her eyes, the spell by which Valombrosa and herself were enchanted, was broken at once. She remembered that it was a mortal voice she had heard; and he saw the purple light of beauty on her cheek, extinguish with the rapture which had kindled it.

His considerate attention then suggested the propriety of separating for the night; and summoning the attendants who were to conduct his sister to her chamber, and to attend Ippolita to her's, he bade them farewell till morning.

Ippolita's apartment lay in that quarter of the Valombrosa palace, where Rosalia slept: it was spacious, yet cheerful; for the elegant arabesques on its walls, were far more agreeable to the eye than the gloomy tapestry in general use; its high, large windows, overlooked arcades of white marble in the garden below, under which a little wilderness of fragrant exotics were sheltered from the cold night air.

The heavens were now thickly spangled with stars; and though the absence of a moon left the extensive gardens in deep shadow, the odorous breathing of the flowers, and the rustling of the evergreens mixing with the sound of remote fountains, made Ippolita unwilling to retire to bed.

The very stillness and darkness of objects, were tranquillizing to her heart; and she became imperceptibly calm, and susceptible of pleasure, even amongst the

scenes which she had believed would wring her soul to torture.

From retracing the past, her thoughts hurried into the future, or lingered round the present: the gracious images of Valombrosa and his sister, again presented themselves; and again the angel voice of the latter seemed wafting her soul to heaven — then the bright vision dissolved; and the miseries she had known, and the friends she had lost, re-opened the source of tears.

Ippolita wept from a variety of feelings: nature at last was exhausted; and having recommended herself, and those dearest to her, to the protection of Providence, she sought repose on her pillow.

CHAPTER V.

The next, and indeed every succeeding day, till acquaintance ripened into friendship, awakened Ippolita to new consolations.

As Rosalia's character developed, she found qualities in her, of a far nobler stamp, than that young creature's artless air of inexperience and innocence, had at first led her to expect; and Rosalia, on her side, prompt to love whatever she must pity, seemed quite to forget that her new companion was perhaps very little beyond the rank of her own gentlewomen.

The caressing manners of the young Signora, added to her amiable disposition, to her delicate youth, and touching privation, gradually won Ippolita from that

system of self-respecting reserve which she had purposed to pursue.

At first, when Valombrosa was not there to watch over his sister's wants, Ippolita in silent observation eyed the attendants who supplied his place; by degrees she ventured to anticipate her young friend's wishes, and to call her maids' attention to their mistress's effort of assisting herself: at last, too anxious for her comfort, and too eager for her gratification, to wait the slow conception of hireling duty, Ippolita would start to aid her searching hand and doubtful step.

If she were sick, Ippolita would soothe and nurse her; Ippolita would invent a variety of simple delicacies, with which to tempt faint appetite; Ippolita would sit unwearied by her side, alternately lulling her into sleep by singing some old romance, or amusing her with stories of what she had seen and noted during her eventful life.

Affection lightened and dignified every

humble office; and Valombrosa, who had remarked with some admiration, but more surprise, the silent dignity with which Ippolita had at first shunned any show of that devotion with which dependants usually seek favour, was charmed to see his sister thus beloved.

It was evident to him, that Rosalia's gentle attentions had greatly subdued the regrets of her new friend; and that whatever were the cause which for some time after her arrival in Florence, had absorbed Ippolita almost wholly in a strange state of abstraction, it was now displaced by solicitude for Rosalia, and gratitude to him.

Rosalia too, was the happier, for having a person to solace: her character ennobled with exertion; and her health rapidly improved, as much from the new impulse given to her mind, as by the judicious treatment of Ippolita.

Upon all these things Valombrosa would often ponder, even while absent

from the two beings whose society excited them; and perhaps he pondered too often, and too long.

In those unrestrained conversations which followed the greater intimacy of Rosalia and Ippolita, the latter had imparted all she dared, of her private history; and from it, in corroboration of the few details given by the prior of Spirito Santo, Valombrosa learnt that Ippolita's family were scattered with the unfortunate house of Medici, through other lands. That she had early lost her mother, and had been ever since, sharing the wanderings of a father, whose fortunes had fallen with those of the exiled family.

"Was he of Florence, then?" Valombrosa too eagerly asked.

A variety of extraordinary expressions had at that question altered the countenance of Ippolita, who replied not for some moments: at length, keeping down her eyes, she said in a stifled voice, "an

oblivious flood will soon pass over all that remains of my ill-fated race: it is best to forget whence we issued, and whither we are hastening!" She looked up, and meeting the inquiring gaze of her protector, hastily added with a paler cheek, "Even the warmest lovers of ingenuousness have sometimes their miserable secret; pardon me therefore, that I have mine."

From that period, neither Valombrosa nor his sister attempted to penetrate further. Yet each had their suspicion that Ippolita was of Florentine extraction, and that the name of Martello was assumed.

Eager to elevate her to a rank equal with his own, Valombrosa's lively fancy, at first determined that she must be one of the Medici themselves; but an instant's consideration undeceived him.

When that illustrious race were expelled from Florence, fourteen years before, he was ten years old; therefore

distinctly remembered the complexions and figures of each individual of the family; and in none of them could he recall the slightest resemblance to Martello's short person, and sanguine colour. It was evident, however, that whatever Martello had been, he was of a quality to associate intimately with the noblest: for Ippolita spoke familiarly of every distinguished leader attached to the Medici cause; and every Prince in whose states they had been received. And though she rarely mentioned the Medici themselves, she never heard their names uttered by others, and their past conduct or future designs canvassed, without appearing to Valombrosa's watchful observation, to take the most powerful interest in the discourse.

On such occasions Ippolita was uniformly silent; for though she knew that the cause of that unfortunate house had still its supporters even in Florence itself, she wished to conduct herself as one of

no higher interests, than what became the daughter of an obscure Captain of Condottieri.

Her discreet demeanor, while it kept curiosity dormant, left no room for the proudest Florentine to blame the generous mode in which the poor orphan was treated by the Signora Rosalia. In all companies Ippolita preserved a modest reserve of speech and look, which made her rather a spectator than an actor there.

This behaviour helped to veil the beauty which otherwise must have attracted, and the intelligence that must have detained each wandering eye and ear: female envy was consequently laid asleep by her retiringness, and men's ardours chilled by her unchanging indifference; — they called her the Beautiful Statue.

But could they have seen her as Valombrosa and Rosalia saw her, when mixing her heart and mind and soul with theirs in a thousand delightful interchanges of thought and feeling

and imagination; when melting into tenderness at Rosalia's voice; when kindling into enthusiasm with Valombrosa, over marbles to which the Promethean touch of genius had given life and motion; or canvass, on which the mighty mind of Michael Angelo or the angelic spirit of Raphael, had stamped its own sublimity; had they seen her, when gazing with those two chosen friends, after the bright car of Dante, alternately fathoming the abysses of Inferno, or lost amid the splendors of the Empyrean; had they seen her when pouring out her fervent thanks to the Almighty for reviving her heart to affections she never hoped to indulge again; had they seen her thus, the obtusest faculty must have acknowledged, and the stoniest heart have felt the united force of her beauty and of her character.

Yet even the friends Ippolita now loved so well, were long before they were admitted into all the mysteries of a cha-

racter, which at first simply interested, but at last astonished them.

Her modest, though beautiful exterior, could excite no expectation of the extraordinary soul by which it was informed: for the usual tranquillity of her complexion did not even brighten her dark and deeply-shaded eyes into more than a gentle lustre; and as she had the habit of listening and speaking with those eyes cast down, the most momentous changes might be passing in her mind, without becoming visible to the persons she conversed with.

Conscious that her character was beyond the general scale of her sex, she had the instinctive discretion of seeking to keep its superiority concealed; and as she could clothe the noblest thoughts in the simplest phrase, the peculiar loftiness of her sentiments often passed unnoticed while they were uttered. Thus, when she was called into action upon great occasions, even the persons who fancied they knew her best, were asto-

nished to see her act with an energy and ability, rarely equalled by women.

Ippolita disdained art, yet did she sway every one with whom she lived; those only excepted, whose worldly interests clashed with her's,—so much harder is it to subdue sordidness, than to pacify humour. She acquired this power simply by a talent for conciliating, which having its source in real benevolence, won its way to its object unperceived and unsuspected. She maintained her power, by never seeking to display it.

Having established for herself a standard of excellence, which it was the aim of her life to reach; and having fixed her eye upon the sublimest objects, she could not stoop it to the low gratifications of vanity.

Her own approbation, (after that of Heaven,) was what she sought: and while her fortune smiled, she sought it, not by superstitious and useless restraints; but

CHAPTER V.

The next, and indeed every succeeding day, till acquaintance ripened into friendship, awakened Ippolita to new consolations.

As Rosalia's character developed, she found qualities in her, of a far nobler stamp, than that young creature's artless air of inexperience and innocence, had at first led her to expect; and Rosalia, on her side, prompt to love whatever she must pity, seemed quite to forget that her new companion was perhaps very little beyond the rank of her own gentlewomen.

The caressing manners of the young Signora, added to her amiable disposition, to her delicate youth, and touching privation, gradually won Ippolita from that

system of self-respecting reserve which she had purposed to pursue.

At first, when Valombrosa was not there to watch over his sister's wants, Ippolita in silent observation eyed the attendants who supplied his place; by degrees she ventured to anticipate her young friend's wishes, and to call her maids' attention to their mistress's effort of assisting herself: at last, too anxious for her comfort, and too eager for her gratification, to wait the slow conception of hireling duty, Ippolita would start to aid her searching hand and doubtful step.

If she were sick, Ippolita would soothe and nurse her; Ippolita would invent a variety of simple delicacies, with which to tempt faint appetite; Ippolita would sit unwearied by her side, alternately lulling her into sleep by singing some old romance, or amusing her with stories of what she had seen and noted during her eventful life.

Affection lightened and dignified every

humble office; and Valombrosa, who had remarked with some admiration, but more surprise, the silent dignity with which Ippolita had at first shunned any show of that devotion with which dependants usually seek favour, was charmed to see his sister thus beloved.

It was evident to him, that Rosalia's gentle attentions had greatly subdued the regrets of her new friend; and that whatever were the cause which for some time after her arrival in Florence, had absorbed Ippolita almost wholly in a strange state of abstraction, it was now displaced by solicitude for Rosalia, and gratitude to him.

Rosalia too, was the happier, for having a person to solace: her character ennobled with exertion; and her health rapidly improved, as much from the new impulse given to her mind, as by the judicious treatment of Ippolita.

Upon all these things Valombrosa would often ponder, even while absent

from the two beings whose society excited them; and perhaps he pondered too often, and too long.

In those unrestrained conversations which followed the greater intimacy of Rosalia and Ippolita, the latter had imparted all she dared, of her private history; and from it, in corroboration of the few details given by the prior of Spirito Santo, Valombrosa learnt that Ippolita's family were scattered with the unfortunate house of Medici, through other lands. That she had early lost her mother, and had been ever since, sharing the wanderings of a father, whose fortunes had fallen with those of the exiled family.

"Was he of Florence, then?" Valombrosa too eagerly asked.

A variety of extraordinary expressions had at that question altered the countenance of Ippolita, who replied not for some moments: at length, keeping down her eyes, she said in a stifled voice, "an

oblivious flood will soon pass over all that remains of my ill-fated race : it is best to forget whence we issued, and whither we are hastening!" She looked up, and meeting the inquiring gaze of her protector, hastily added with a paler cheek, "Even the warmest lovers of ingenuousness have sometimes their miserable secret; pardon me therefore, that I have mine."

From that period, neither Valombrosa nor his sister attempted to penetrate further. Yet each had their suspicion that Ippolita was of Florentine extraction, and that the name of Martello was assumed.

Eager to elevate her to a rank equal with his own, Valombrosa's lively fancy, at first determined that she must be one of the Medici themselves; but an instant's consideration undeceived him.

When that illustrious race were expelled from Florence, fourteen years before, he was ten years old; therefore

distinctly remembered the complexions and figures of each individual of the family; and in none of them could he recall the slightest resemblance to Martello's short person, and sanguine colour. It was evident, however, that whatever Martello had been, he was of a quality to associate intimately with the noblest: for Ippolita spoke familiarly of every distinguished leader attached to the Medici cause; and every Prince in whose states they had been received. And though she rarely mentioned the Medici themselves, she never heard their names uttered by others, and their past conduct or future designs canvassed, without appearing to Valombrosa's watchful observation, to take the most powerful interest in the discourse.

On such occasions Ippolita was uniformly silent; for though she knew that the cause of that unfortunate house had still its supporters even in Florence itself, she wished to conduct herself as one of

no higher interests, than what became the daughter of an obscure Captain of Condottieri.

Her discreet demeanor, while it kept curiosity dormant, left no room for the proudest Florentine to blame the generous mode in which the poor orphan was treated by the Signora Rosalia. In all companies Ippolita preserved a modest reserve of speech and look, which made her rather a spectator than an actor there.

This behaviour helped to veil the beauty which otherwise must have attracted, and the intelligence that must have detained each wandering eye and ear: female envy was consequently laid asleep by her retiringness, and men's ardours chilled by her unchanging indifference; — they called her the Beautiful Statue.

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and imagination; when melting into tenderness at Rosalia's voice; when kindling into enthusiasm with Valombrosa, over marbles to which the Promethean touch of genius had given life and motion; or canvass, on which the mighty mind of Michael Angelo or the angelic spirit of Raphael, had stamped its own sublimity; had they seen her, when gazing with those two chosen friends, after the bright car of Dante, alternately fathoming the abysses of Inferno, or lost amid the splendors of the Empyrean; had they seen her when pouring out her fervent thanks to the Almighty for reviving her heart to affections she never hoped to indulge again; had they seen her thus, the obtusest faculty must have acknowledged, and the stoniest heart have felt the united force of her beauty and of her character.

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Her own approbation, (after that of Heaven,) was what she sought: and while her fortune smiled, she sought it, not by superstitious and useless restraints; but

by free enjoyment of all the pleasures of society, and cheerful devotedness to all its duties. When that fortune frowned, then she laboured to walk confidingly through storms and darkness, and to trust on the very verge of destruction.

In truth, the perfection of her character was in danger only from an excess of self-discipline; since in resolving to extirpate selfishness, Ippolita sometimes removed herself to such an unattainable height from her less heroically practised friends, that affection and sympathy sighed over their disunion.

It was this character, so firm in action, so heroic in principle, yet so moderate in expression, which fitted her for the peculiar situation in which she was now placed. Providence appeared to have conducted her there, for the purpose of raising and fixing in future strength, the feebler spirit of Rosalia.

Ippolita thought she saw this commission legibly written in the enthusiastic

fondness with which the young Rosalia not merely assented to her opinions, but strove to act on them; and after a short period, she decided that it was therefore her duty to remain in Florence.

Happy is the youthful heart which is warmed into enthusiasm by excellence, real, not imagined; for then, its liveliest passions, instead of obstructing its upward flight, give wings to the great desire.

Rosalia studied Ippolita's conduct and conversation with as much devotion as she listened to her confessor: but she boasted not her scholarship; and Ippolita never reproving, never declaiming, left the young pupil to learn from her conduct under misfortune, what she had herself learned, alas, from the faults of others, and from a sad variety of wretchedness!

A word dropt by accident; a passing reflection in general conversation; a sigh checked when some painful association

occurred; the sudden silence of disapproval; each, and all of these from Ippolita, contained volumes of instruction to Rosalia. She felt herself rising in her own esteem, in proportion to her mental exertions, and she soon loved Ippolita the better, for having excited her to improvement.

Valombrosa was too attentive an observer, not to perceive very quickly, the ascendancy of his fair charge, and its beneficial influence upon his sister's yet imperfect, but interesting character.

Accustomed to indulge every excess of her sensibility without murmuring, he scarcely wished her mind strengthened for his own sake; but he perceived all the consequence of so important a change to herself; and therefore, he too, regarded her gentle teacher with livelier interest.

He was at this period particularly anxious to retain such a friend near his sister: for the lady who had hitherto

lived with her, was no longer in Florence. During his absence on the late service, she had been sent for by a sister who was dying, and who made it her last prayer that she would take charge of the infants she was about to leave motherless. It was not likely therefore, that Rosalia would ever again enjoy the comfort of this exemplary person's society.

Valombrosa early confessed to Ippolita his wish upon this subject, and Ippolita consented to remain with Rosalia till he could select for her some suitable female guardian. But still she warned him that her actions were not free, and that the fulfilment of this engagement must depend upon the arrival of a letter from an absent person who would write to her through the medium of the prior of the Spirito Santo.

Upon this letter therefore hung the hopes of Rosalia and her brother.

As his sister still preferred a very

limited circle, Valombrosa only brought to her presence the most intimate of his friends, and the most distinguished of his protegées. But his accessible and generous nature so multiplied the claims of society upon his own time, that he could rarely join his sister till the day was closing.

Every one that needed a protector, or a benefactor, sought him in the rich and amiable Valombrosa. His treasury was alike open to reward as to relieve; and his courts as much filled by ingenious artists as by indigent petitioners.

If one citizen wished to portion a daughter or advance a son; if a second were a bankrupt; if a third required public patronage, they all came to Valombrosa. Every day he had as many suits to hear, and wrongs to seek redress for, as if it had been his profession to defend the rights of every individual in Florence; and every day he was called

upon for as many ducats as though he commanded the bank of the Republic.

It cannot be denied that Valombrosa's judgment did not always equal his zeal in the service of others; nor his prudence proportion his gifts to his revenue. At four-and-twenty, the heart settles it as an incontrovertible truth, that the unfortunate are always deserving, and it therefore frequently expends upon the worthless, that interest or assistance, which, upon closer investigation, might have been better bestowed.

At four-and-twenty we do not calculate what we can afford, but what others want: we forget that there is more true benevolence in exciting industry and providing it employment, than in bestowing alms, and thus destroying the heart's best feelings, by hardening it to dependance.

Valombrosa was of course often disappointed in the objects of his bounty, but that never disheartened him; and his

purse continued to be drained by prodigal gifts, in defiance of his steward's annual remonstrance.

In truth, Valombrosa would rather give his money than his time to his crowd of suppliants; for he loved leisure and pleasure; and pursued his present popular career, not from the activity of a character fond of exciting occupations, but from the kindly impulse of a heart which could not bear to be selfishly happy.

It must be confessed, that Valombrosa was often "weary of well-doing," when some tedious applicant was winding with useless circumlocution round a dry tale, while some gay festival and gallant show were waiting the presence of the impatient listener. He would not have acknowledged this the next day to his own heart, without a suffused cheek, though he sometimes yielded to the hurrying impulse at the time.

Valombrosa loved the graceful joust,

the sprightly ball, the dangerous chase; and as he excelled in every bodily accomplishment, was generally the foremost in all. Rosalia amused by his lively account of the little incidents growing out of these sports, would try, like a playful child, to win him into acknowledgments of the admiration he excited. He would answer each partial question, with good humoured sportiveness; and sometimes with a frank simplicity, almost as artless and engaging as her own: yet Ippolita, whose penetration had an eagle glance, though her eye had not, never perceived the faintest spark of vanity under his entertaining narratives.

This perfect freedom from that meanest alloy of true manliness, was in her estimation, one of the most valuable of Valombrosa's characteristics; and dwelling upon all the virtues she really saw in him, and all his partial sister described, the faults of his nature escaped her wholly.

Confining herself to the retired customs of Rosalia, whose situation kept her from taking even that small share of domestic superintendance which falls to the lot of noble women; she never saw Valombrosa in those moments when the blunders or omissions of a domestic struck the fire out of his temper: rarely being with him in large societies, she could not compare his descriptions of men with themselves, therefore she detected neither his credulous dependance upon other people's representations, nor the prejudices which grew out of that fatal habit.

That kindly indolence which made him rather prefer leaving his friends in quiet possession of their hurtful failings, than rousing himself to disturb them, had certainly blended with fond indulgence in his care of his sister: but to have detected this it would have been requisite for Ippolita to have traced the principle where no such amiable feeling

operated; and she had not an opportunity of doing so.

In his conduct to herself he had been uniformly generous, delicate, and respectful; nay, he had been more — sympathising and kind. He had snatched her from possible outrages which it was horror but to imagine. He was associated with all the recollections of a sad, sad period; his name, coupled with generous magnificence, had been familiar to her long ere she beheld him: was it strange, then, that she should feel gratitude and admiration even to a painful excess?

Had she quitted Florence at this period, she would have carried with her all the glow of this dangerous union of two delightful sentiments: but Fate decreed otherwise; and she staid to discover that her Divinity was a mortal.

CHAPTER VI.

The packet Ippolita expected through the channel of Spirito Santo, was at length brought to her by one of the monks. He that wrote it was involved in new difficulties, exposed to new dangers; and he exhorted her, therefore, to stay with her present kind protectors, until he could call her to a home, or be forced to bid her shelter for ever in a religious house.

The monk carried back her answer to go by the same circuitous mode; and Ippolita, who had retired from the company of Rosalia and her brother, to read and reply to her packet, hastened to dispel the emotion it had excited in her, and to tell her anxious friends, which

she did with a sickening pang at her heart checking its momentary gush of comfort, that she might yet remain with them.

Rosalia's joy flowed out in thanks, embraces, benedictions; in every endearment of which affectionate youth is so liberal. Valombrosa's eyes sparkled with a sudden and unusual expression. It was new to Ippolita from his eyes: but she had too often seen something like it in those of another, not to think on its possible meaning in his. A hasty movement of her head snatched her face from his observation.

"And your friend does not fear to trust you with us?" he asked, with more emotion in his voice, than he suspected himself.

"He is only too grateful for the generous friendship with which his Ippolita is honoured," replied she, steadily keeping down her eyes.

"His!" repeated Valombrosa, almost

audibly. At that moment he thought it mattered not to him who this friend might be; and, for a short time afterwards, his spirits were extravagantly high: but as suddenly he fell into a reverie, and though he roused himself from it with a gay smile when his sister noticed his silence, he presently sunk back in the same abstraction.

Several times he roused from it; but each time with less vivacity and greater impatience of manner. He declined hearing Rosalia sing; and once his voice, when replying to some indifferent question of Ippolita's, had an asperity in its tone which jarred her very heart-strings.

This extraordinary change perplexed and troubled her. How was she further astonished at the petulant action which followed!

Rosalia's dog had several times fawned upon Valombrosa, seeking its accustomed caress, and as many times had Valombrosa put it by with his hand; at first

gently, by degrees with more humour; till at last the creature jumped more importunately against him. "Down, Fido," he cried, in a voice of thunder. Ippolita thought his very cheek struck fire.

Recalled to himself by her appalled look and Rosalia's exclamation, ashamed of his irritation, unable to explain it to them, or even to himself, Valombrosa's blood rose to his temples, and stammering out some broken words of shame and repentance he hurried from the room.

He did not return; but he left behind an indulgent judge, and an able advocate. Rosalia for the first time lightly noticed this defect in his nature, but repeated many affecting instances in which he had nobly vanquished it. Ippolita could not refuse her approbation of such conduct; nor hesitate to confess that there is no comparison in the scale of moral value, between the man who simply exercises a constitutional virtue, and

he that stems the torrent of an opposite propensity. Yet could she not forget the voice and the eye-flash of Valombrosa. *It haunted her lonely musings when she* parted with Rosalia, adding another unit to swell her account of pleasures always followed by pains.

Was, then, this noble creature the victim of caprice? Did he repent the hasty ardour with which he had formerly urged her to remain with his sister? Perhaps he did. Perhaps he was one of those persons who see the objections to an action precisely when they have completed it. Perhaps he dreaded the consequences of harbouring a powerless orphan whose surviving relatives adhered to the exiled family! Possibly he might like Ippolita less for knowing her longer, and be tired now of that dejected manner which had at first awakened his pity?

Ippolita, alas, had seen too much of human nature, to dare repel with romantic prepossession, the suspicion that

Valombrosa had his failings. Yet some secret weakness within her, made her more *readily imagine herself* wearisome, *than* him capricious: and she wept over the belief, while she blushed at what she deemed the presumptuous fancy which a momentary glance of his, had flashed through her heart that very evening.

"I was too happy here," she said, "while thou, most dear, most honoured! (apostrophizing one far distant,) wast in pain and peril. And this discovery of a weakness, where I thought all was greatly consistent, is the salutary chastisement of my selfishness."

Pursuing similar reflections, through many an anxious maze, Ippolita at length fell asleep.

Meanwhile Valombrosa in vain tried to banish the recollection of his culpable impatience: he lay restless and self-accusing; suspecting the cause of all this internal tumult, yet shrinking from its investigation.

To have treated Fido unkindly, was not only wrong in itself, but peculiarly so, from the circumstances connected with the animal. Fido was the dog that Valombrosa had rescued at Argentina, with the same show of impetuous temper it is true, but so sanctified by the occasion, that not even a saint had censured. Unclaimed by any one, (his deceased master having been a foreign officer,) Valombrosa had brought the dog to Rosalia.

Thus associated with the most affecting recollections, he decided, that his rough repulse of the attached creature, must have appeared almost savage to Ippolita: here then was food for many a humiliating reflection. The other subject teemed with distracting ones.

At the period in which Valombrosa simply considered Ippolita with humane interest, what she said to others, had passed him unheeded; or if heeded, not registered by a second reflection on its purport: he now tasked his memory for

these buried treasures, and one by one recovered all that he had even transiently attended to.

The first words he remembered her to have uttered were those to her father, when the people about them urged her to provide for her own safety. "O dear father, it is for us you die — and shall I desert you?"— Us! — this little pronoun was full of mystery. This coupling some other person with herself, seemed to imply either a natural or voluntary union with that person.

Spoke she then of a brother, a lover, or a husband? if a brother, why had he left his sister to the protection of his war-worn parent? if a lover, if a husband, could he have abandoned his charge to another?—yet that he had done so, Valombrosa thought he could prove to demonstration.

Ippolita had evidently thrown herself before the entrance of Spirito Santo, in the hope of preventing the entrance of

the soldiery by her passionate pleadings; there was consequently some one within, dearer than her own safety. On her father's appearance, she did not show any thing like the transport which followed his motion of making the sign of the cross upon his breast; this action must therefore have been pre-concerted, as a signal, that the object of her anxiety was no longer in danger.

Her alarm when she saw the dead cavalier lying in the last street which led towards the mountains; her restraining Valombrosa from entering the hermitage till the monk re-appeared; the whispered communication of the recluse; and Ippolita's immediate composure; — every thing united to convince Valombrosa that there was a beloved person, and that he must have escaped in that direction.

What was he then?—who was he?—whither was he going?—and why all this mystery to friends now tried?—Imagination succeeded to imagination,

each equally wild, improbable, and unsatisfactory.

"It is for us you die!" repeated Valombrosa, dwelling on that short sentence, which he fancied contained the whole enigma. At once conviction flashed upon him; — "he must be a Medici!"

This light once thrown upon the darkness seemed to clear it up. Ippolita's father fighting under the orders of the exiled family, and falling in the service of the Pisans, whose rebellion the Medici were known politically to foment, might justly be said to perish for her, and for her lover. The severe vengeance which would be taken upon any one of that race by the Florentines, had any such been made prisoner; the ruin which a leader's destruction brings upon the rest of his party; these motives might in some degree excuse one of the Medici, for seeking his own security by flight.

But on which of that family was Valombrosa to fix this suspicion? — again

the recollection of past incidents assisted him.

Lorenzo the Magnificent, left three sons, Piero, Giovanni, and Guiliano; the first, after provoking the expulsion of his family, and wearing out his manhood in vain enterprizes to recover his lost power and patrimony, was at last drowned in the Garigliano. Giovanni had been from childhood a member of the sacred college. Guiliano, though in the brightest meridian of life, was a philosophic unambitious man, who though tossed about on the stormy sea of the family destiny, did not appear of an adventurous spirit, nor of a character likely to captivate such an one as Ippolita. None of these could be the object Valombrosa sought.

But Piero had left a son. This son was said to inherit much of the family reputation for talents and accomplishments: with spirit enough to make him the idol of a party, and none of that generous disregard of self, which might at last render

him its sacrifice. Handsome; specious, nay, in some points, as amiable as he seemed, this second Lorenzo might have had the address to appear a worthy successor of the first; and though his unripe youth might perhaps destroy the probability of his being the chosen partner of a woman whose mind was far beyond her years, affection was not always to be measured by its reasonableness.

Valombrosa corroborated the fact to his own imagination, by a circumstance which had occurred a few days before.—While looking with him over his collection of ancient manuscripts, (many of which had belonged to the Laurentian collection, before it was dispersed by the exile of its owners,) Ippolita took down an illuminated copy of Virgil, where, in the midst of all the splendid decorations which marked the taste of Lorenzo's successor, was painted the device of Piero, that device which his son was known to bear. Ippolita's eyes

rivetted there with such an expression, that Valombrosa in distress at his careless forgetfulness of her interest in the Medici, withdrew the book from her hand. Ippolita then burst into a passion of tears, weeping long, and unreservedly; and at last retired without apology or explanation. These recollections occurred again and again to the sleepless pillow of her protector.—This bitter emotion, her former anxiety, such evidences of sensibility to that name, added to the shapings of Valombrosa's brain: but then her growing satisfaction in her present residence! well then, perhaps she was already Lorenzo's wife; and perhaps in that close connection, his overbearing and selfish temper had developed itself, and weaned her affection partly from him. If his character were in truth what it was said to be, it would be impossible for such a nature as her's to continue loving one so different: it was equally impossible for her to fail in her obligation as a wife.

What then was left to that heedless admiration which Valombrosa had felt growing in his bosom, and would not reflect on? What but instant extinction. He wished the task as easy in performance, as it was heartily consented to by every power of a soul naturally inclined to virtue. Resolution, however, he knew would not now be wanting; since it seemed no longer a question of prudence but of honour; and since temptation assailed him, in the suspicion of her alienated affection, and her lover's or husband's selfish desertion of her in a time of peril.

But even were she not bound by inclination or duty to another, what could the Marquis Valombrosa propose to himself from indulging the passion she inspired!

If she were indeed the daughter of an obscure adventurer, would not his marriage with her be condemned by all his compatriots? would it not shock the hereditary prejudices of his sister and his

kindred? and even were she the offspring of a noble Florentine, attached to the fortunes of the Medici, would not his union with her be received as his profession of political faith, and the forfeiture of all his rights and possessions be the immediate consequence!

The idea of ever being more to her than a friend, was madness; and aware that her tempered manner had never encouraged him to hope she thought of him in any other relation, he believed the struggle would be all his own, and therefore he determined to make it.

Youth rarely tries to exterminate any uneasy passion: it seeks but to dissipate it. Valombrosa thought he had subdued his enemy, when he himself took to flight: and as he after this, hurried from amusement to amusement, fancied because various objects forced themselves upon his senses, that the one he avoided was less in his heart.

From the period in which he became

sensible of his danger in Ippolita's society, he spent more of his time abroad than at home; he frequented the houses of other Florentines; he was the foremost at all their public shows and civic festivals: he went often to the camp of the Florentine General, who was now straitening Pisa of provisions, sure of its gates being opened to him by famine: he assumed a tone of wilder vivacity, and whenever his sister's endearments charmed him to stay with her, his ceaseless gaiety seemed bent upon excluding every conversation which could penetrate further than the surface of each other's minds.

Ippolita marked this change with extreme regret, for it seemed a sad earnest of the debasing effects which follow a career of mere pleasure. The habit of dissipating every serious thought by a succession of agreeable sensations, is as fatal to happiness as to virtue: for when amusement is uniformly substituted for objects of moral and mental interest, we

lose all that elevates our enjoyments above the scale of childish pleasures: each individual learns to consider himself as the sole spectator of the great drama of life; and he sits and beholds, laughs and mocks, enjoys or yawns through a worthless existence; then sinks into the grave despised and forgotten!

But whither goes the immortal soul?—Ippolita at first doubted whether Valombrosa's desertion of his home and his former habits, did not point at her; and arise from some apprehension of danger to his character as a patriot, in consequence of her possible connection with the Exiles. Determined to act promptly upon such an apprehension, if it existed, she examined his conduct to herself more closely.

But though he evidently shunned her company, whenever they did meet she read in his looks even more than in his manner, any thing but dislike, or distaste, or distrust. She would often discover

that some new attention to her comfort, had been suggested by him; and not merely her wants, but almost her secret wishes anticipated by his generous though silent observation. Were her looks or her spirits altered, he did not notice the alteration by words, but at such times if ever she raised her eyes, they met such an expression of piercing interest in his, that for the moment all her thoughts were thrown into confusion. The next instant his changed manner would reverse her feelings, and leave her dubious whether fancy or reality had given their colouring to his countenance. Sometimes, after an evening past in this contradictory conduct, Ippolita would ask herself why she watched it so anxiously, and felt it so keenly? then her heart would beat with ominous alarm, and she would say, "What have I to do with a sentiment which is only for the fortunate! Has not my cup of misery been full enough, but I must overflow it with this last deadly

drop?—O no, no!—it is not for me to love, and to love a Florentine!"

But alas, it is not so easy to act as to will: Ippolita could only banish the hopes and the delusions of the passion; not its pains, not its wishes!—

How, indeed, was she to prevent the increase of an affection which had imperceptibly reached its present height, by daily additions to those sentiments of gratitude and admiration which Valombrosa deservedly excited?

In defiance of all his care to keep his noblest actions concealed, they penetrated to the retirement of Rosalia, and were by her detailed with all a sister's exultation, to their mutual friend. So many proofs of active goodness, were perhaps but the more valuable from one whose natural love of ease made every great exertion an act of heroism, and far out-balanced in their effect, the lighter parts of Valombrosa's present conduct.

Devoting the prime of every day to

the self-imposed duties of benevolence; were a few poor hours snatched from the night, to be grudged him, when social pleasure invited him in a thousand charming shapes? Was Ippolita to think the worse of him, because he wearied a little with the monotony of his home, and sought society more congenial to his happy temperament than that of a sightless sister; and a creature who willing to fortify herself against the blows of fate, had, perhaps, "forgot herself to stone?"

Every time she asked herself these questions, she replied to herself in the affirmative: yet dissatisfaction remained at her heart; and she felt that nothing could be right, which evidently changed Valombrosa for the worse.

Meanwhile the innocent Rosalia found only cause for gladness in her brother's livelier habits; it was now delightful to her, "to look at happiness through another's eyes:" she rejoiced that her brother relished so many different amusements; she rejoiced to find herself no

longer selfish enough to wish it otherwise; she rejoiced that he cultivated a social feeling which must attract to his character and person, all the admiration she fondly called their due; and she looked to his return from every gay scene, as to a holiday for herself.

Valombrosa, not unfrequently returned from these parties, with little presents from ladies, or they were sent him anonymously; and Rosalia, as he transferred them to her, would laughingly accuse him of having won them by some dishonest flatteries; his sportive evasions would then leave Ippolita to fear that his heart was of that easy mould, which receives an impression from every beauty, without retaining a permanent stamp from any; and she felt degraded by the occasional looks of tenderness which had not often betrayed her into the belief that she had made an exclusive interest there. Her alarmed delicacy then suggested the most scrupulous

watch over her own actions, lest at any time the secret of her weakness should escape, and become known to him.

Even were all other obstacles between them destroyed, Ippolita would not have endured the thought of owing Valombrosa's love to grateful pity; (of vanity, she saw him incapable,) nor could she bear the idea of giving up her affections to a capricious man, whose returns could be only the poor tribute of a few momentary transports. Real love is so proud, or so delicate, or so generous!

Actuated by these considerations, she not merely succeeded in banishing from her exterior the least appearance of peculiar tenderness for Valombrosa, but by the severest discipline, she weakened the feeling itself in her struggling bosom.

Valombrosa had been the hero, while he now and then met an anxious glance from Ippolita's quickly-withdrawn eye, or read the agitating effect of his sudden

entrance in her fluttering voice; but no sooner were these appearances withheld, and a steady air of calm esteem substituted, than his resolution lost its secret support, (the delightful consciousness of having interested,) and with it fell both the will and the effort to appear carelessly happy.

Ippolita was disturbed by the change she observed in Valombrosa; yet why should she believe that his conduct had reference to her? It is true, his levity was exchanged for melancholy, his social gaieties for solitary study, his feverish brightness, for languid paleness; but he came as seldom as heretofore into Rosalia's apartment when Ippolita was with her, and whenever they *did* meet, met her in silence, and sad distance.

Discarding, therefore, every idea as vain and injurious, which had made her suspect him of a passing partiality for herself, she naturally expressed that anxiety

for his fading health, which was warranted by the services he had rendered to her, and the esteem he merited.

Surprised, flattered, re-animated, the first time she ventured to add some kind advice to her inquiries, Valombrosa's countenance lighted up with instant animation.

"If I might venture to say what I think," said Ippolita, gently smiling, "I should say, you are now paying the penalty of your follv, in trying to reconcile two things that never can coalesce cordially; a life of benevolence, and a life of pleasure. You have entered with equal ardour into both, I fear, and you are exhausted with too much impulse, and too much action."

"You believe, that I enter with equal ardour into both!" repeated Valombrosa with a glance of amiable reproach. Ippolita's softened eyes fell under the glance. After a moment's hesitation, she said

tremulously, "we can judge only by appearances."

"Ah, Signora!" cried Valombrosa, "if it is thus you judge me —" He broke off, then resuming in a gayer tone, "So then you condemn innocent amusement; yet I should have thought you very far from recommending unsocial gloom —" again he hesitated.

"You are right, my Lord," returned Ippolita, "I love cheerfulness and society; but surely there is a becoming temperance in all things; and you will own that you have been drinking rather largely lately of pleasure's inebriating cup?" She spoke with pensive playfulness, yet Valombrosa coloured deeply and looked down.

Ippolita more tenderly resumed, "surely dissipation is but the fool's and the libertine's substitute for a blessing which he has not the capacity of enjoying? Something far nobler is reserved for the enlightened and the good. I can, indeed, imagine a happiness so perfect, that plea-

sures would disturb, not increase it; and, believe me, the materials for such happiness are not to be collected in thoughtless crowds."

For the first time since their acquaintance, Valombrosa saw, for a moment, the whole soul of Ippolita in her beautiful face: his own kindled with sudden hope. "I too can imagine it," he said, "I too could value such happiness,—and I know how it should be sought, and where it might be found. Might I but dare to hope, that no insuperable—" again he interrupted himself.

Ippolita's throbbing heart was seen to beat violently through her slight cymar: in spite of all her efforts, the disorder of her looks was too powerful for concealment; and as none but delightful and delighted feelings were visible there, (for in this restoration of Valombrosa to her complete esteem, every painful circumstance was forgot,) it was not possible for him to remain irresolute.

At that moment Rosalia's voice, as she was entering, recalled Ippolita to recollection, who, hastening to meet her, left Valombrosa charged in every thought and every feeling; thrilling with a confusion of hopes, and wishes, and recollections; trying in vain to arrange the delightful confusion of his mind, and locked in a transport which nearly realized the happiness Ippolita had described.

Seated at her organ, Rosalia sang again and again, and he heard her not; she ceased, and his ear did not perceive the silence; she approached, and he did not see her.

"He is still here, is he not," she said, addressing Ippolita. "Orlando, what ails you? it is not often that I sing, and you do not utter, at least, one little word of kindness."

Valombrosa started at the light touch of her lip upon his forehead. Fondly taking her in his arms as he returned

the caress, he apologized by confessing he had been lost in thought.

"And of what were you thinking, dearest?" asked his sister, arranging his redundant hair with as much nicety, as though she could see its clustering curls.

Valombrosa looked at Ippolita — hesitated — now felt his courage fail, and then revive, while noticing the rich crimson which yet remained on her cheek.

Rosalia pressed to know his thoughts, "is he not a cruel churl to us, Ippolita?" asked she, with a sweet and innocent smile. "I dare say the proud creature thinks we are not capable of understanding his high thoughts."

"My Rosalia, my sweet Rosalia," repeated the fond brother, drawing her closer to him, "if you would *command* me to avow those *high thoughts* — if you would engage beforehand that our friend here would forgive me for the presumptuous curiosity of those thoughts — no,

not the curiosity, the interest, the deep interest," he paused.

"You *will* forgive him, won't you, Ippolita?" demanded Rosalia, "for my sake; and won't you let me ask him what *were* his thoughts?"

Ippolita, with trembling eagerness, was about to conjure her friend to inquire no further, but timely recollecting that such a request would betray too much consciousness, she recovered herself, and affecting calmness, gave the permission sought.

Valombrosa's resolution failed at the precise moment in which he most required it; his eyes, no longer sparkling with ardent fire, were irresolute and averted: his voice was not audible. Rosalia could not see these changes, but she observed the flutter of his words, and she felt the tremor of his hand, her own romantic wishes made her urge him to proceed: and again she bespoke Ippo-

lita's indulgence for his possible temerity.

Ashamed of his boyishness, and anxious not to lose so fair an opportunity of satisfying himself upon the point most important to his peace, Valombrosa mastered his agitation, and affecting his sister's sportive tone, said, " I was thinking whether any one could have uttered the sentiment Signora Ippolita did just now, that there is a happiness so perfect, that pleasures would disturb it, unless they had known such happiness themselves; in short, I was conjecturing whether there may not exist some fortunate man who has a right to share such a lot with her."

"Pardon me, pardon me!" he added, rising in disorder and disappointment, as he saw her countenance suddenly change and her lip quiver.

His look of extreme distress suffused her cheek again with the lovely red so rarely there: she extended her hand to

him with a smile of enchanting frankness, and modestly averting her eyes, said, "if my friends would ask whether I am married or not, I answer them, no."

Valombrosa's bright eye-flash needed no interpreter: Ippolita thought that eloquent look explained all Valombrosa's inconsistencies, nobly explained them; and for the few delightful hours which intervened between that moment and their hour of rest, she forgot that a stern destiny fixed her enjoyment of Valombrosa's love, at the price of his honour, his kindred, and his country.

In this evening Valombrosa was himself again; more than himself. No longer afraid of pouring out his own heart, or fathoming that of Ippolita, he displayed so profound a sensibility, and showed such a capacity for the best and noblest enjoyments of our nature, that Ippolita reproached herself for ever having feared that such a nature could be en-

gulphed in worthless pursuits, or degraded by luxurious habits.

Passion indeed might madden, prejudice mislead; but pleasures could never enslave, nor frivolity annihilate him.

Lost in the charm of that eloquence of the heart, which was peculiar to Valombrosa, and hurried away by the gratification of seeing his character, uniting in free, unfettered sympathy with her own, Ippolita for once surrendered herself to the bliss of a present hour, on which future suffering waited as its shadow; and Rosalia, catching the glow of her friend and of her brother, completed their happiness by her's.

From this period, Ippolita could no longer condemn Valombrosa for seeking delight in the dissipations of common minds; he drew his most chosen companions to his own residence; and by the utmost confidence respecting all his pursuits and interests, associated himself

more intimately with the views and occupations of his sister and her friend.

He was still in a fairy-land of hope and rapture; Ippolita was gone back to the gloomy realities of truth and self-discipline: he was thinking how best to deserve and win her; she, how to undeceive, and relinquish him.

Valombrosa had never estimated himself justly; and now, weighed in love's balance, against the supposed perfections of its idol, he deemed himself light and worthless: he durst not therefore risk the destruction of his present hopes by a premature disclosure; and anxious to owe nothing to the kind solicitations of Rosalia, he refused himself the indulgence of pouring his heart into that of his dear sister.

At first, Ippolita thought to chill his affection, by an air of cold repulse; but could she so slander her own heart? for if her lover, was he not still her benefactor?

were it not best, simply to confine her feelings to the show of friendship, and neither avoid nor seek him? and if his precipitate temper should hurry him into a distinct declaration of his sentiments, that would be her moment for avowing the existence of obstacles, which would render her return of his attachment destructive to him, and calamitous to herself.

Painful as it was for her to think of leaving Rosalia; of depriving her of the watchful cares, which that tender girl seemed to prize as almost equal to those from her brother, Ippolita now saw the necessity of sacrificing her own feelings in that respect, and the lesser duty her gratitude would still pay to Rosalia, to the imperative one of preserving the peace and honour of the benefactor of them both. She therefore wrote to the relative on whom she depended, explaining her situation, and praying him to appoint some religious house for her to re-

pair to; where secure from the persecution of one, whose pursuit she had successfully baffled by her residence at Florence, she might finally dedicate herself to Heaven. This letter she enclosed in one to the prior of Spirito Santo; and Valombrosa forwarded it, little aware of its cruel contents.

CHAPTER VII.

WINTER was gone, and the return of blooming spring carried the principal of the Florentine nobility, to enjoy its balmy air, among the groves of their different villas.

Valombrosa, glad to escape to shade and retirement, from the bustle and business of the town, prepared to lead his sister and her friend to his favorite retreat of *Il Bel Deserto*; a house well worthy of its name, from the peculiar solitariness and romantic beauty of its situation, and from the perfection of its architecture.

It was situated in one of those high valleys, which open suddenly upon the traveller, among the wildest regions of the Appenines.

Entirely constructed of the finest Carara marble, the unsullied whiteness of the edifice made it visible from a great distance: surrounded by advancing groves, it seemed to recede amongst those groves, as if with the consciousness and modesty of virgin beauty.

The light shafts of its finely-proportioned and glittering pillars, were picturesquely crossed by overhanging trees, which scattering and softening the reflections of sunshine or of moonlight upon the polished columns, varied the light and shade at every movement of the branches.

Except the story of Endymion told in basso relievo upon the architrave of the portico, the building it might be said was devoid of decoration. The same taste for simplicity was conspicuous in the few additions made to its native scenery.

The cool gush of neighbouring waters invited the steps into a thick larch-wood,

where, under a natural grotto, o'ercanopied with wild vines and ivy, a sculptured naiad, slept to the music of her flowing urn.

Tread lightly, stranger, the marble breathes!

Following the course of this gentle stream, through forest walks strewn with Alpine plants, the path conducted downwards; till gradually losing its character of romantic wildness, it emerged in a broad expanse of magnificent gardens.

There terminated the efforts of mortal hands: all beyond, was the wide domain of Nature and of God!

The verdant Appenines rising in every form of sublimity and beauty, the interminable woods, the rivers pouring from distant sources with majestic and continuous sound, the glorious effects of storms and sunshine and clouds; that aspiration after a higher and a purer state of being, that awakened voice which repeating the promise of immor-

tality to man, rouses his slumbering soul like the summons of the Angel at the Judgment-day; these were the awful charms by which the Villa of Valombrosa was surrounded, and his just taste would not mar them, by intermixture with feebler graces.

Here he was accustomed to discard the wearisome pageantries of his rank, and to live with the simplicity of a man who disdains to carry the shackles of ceremony into the free wilds of nature; here, he shut out all the world, but the best and dearest of his friends, and resigned himself solely to the dominion of his heart and his imagination.

Valombrosa was in the very act of departure for this favourite residence, when an attendant informed him that Prince Angelo Rossano requested a short audience.

"I attend him immediately," he said, dismissing the servant; then turning to his sister, added, "I must see this dis-

agreeable personage, I find after all. Some one has died and left him the guardianship of a boy, who brings forward a claim on the alum-mines of my ward, Leonora Donati. This will be my first sight of the proud philosopher; for I have done my best to avoid an interview, — and I fear it will not be my last."

Valombrosa uttered this, between jest and seriousness, leaving Rosalia to detail to the inquiring Ippolita, all she had heard her brother and others, say of the person in question; — the substance of her information, was as follows:

Prince Angelo Rossano was a Neapolitan by birth; his elder brother inheriting the principality, an inferior patrimony devolved to the share of the former.

Prince Rossano had borne a distinguished part in the politics of his distracted country, and having espoused the French interest, was now, with others of the

Anjouin faction, at the court of Louis the Twelfth.

Angelo also, for the first few years of his life, took a large share in public affairs, and was said to have given promise of uncommon ability. During the invasion of Naples, he had greatly distinguished himself amongst its defenders; but on the retreat of King Federigo into France, and the treacherous transfer of the young Duke of Calabria to Castile, he retired in disgust, to his estate in Calabria, and devoted himself to study.

When very young, Rossano had married a lady of remarkable beauty; and it was now alleged, that his cynical humour, assisting the seductions of a young Castilian officer, had caused her to break her marriage vow. Whether impelled by base inclination, or driven to it by her husband's severity, it is certain, that on the discovery of her infidelity, she fled to Castile with her seducer.

After that event, Rossano took no

steps to regain her, nor to avenge his honour; but renouncing his country, he first solicited and obtained a divorce at Rome, then wandered over Greece and Italy, and at last, fixed himself near Florence.

Here he had now lived but one year, little known and less sought: the gay Florentines deemed him an unsocial misanthrope; and from the indifference he had manifested to general opinion upon the flight of his wife, no one thought it uncharitable to conclude, that he had deserved his misfortune.

Valombrosa followed the popular prejudice: he was ever willing to believe that women's crimes, are rather, the effect of outraged feelings than of unprovoked depravity; and he flamed with indignation, whenever he imagined a husband passive under the sting of dishonour. In his accidental mention, therefore, of the naturalized stranger, he spoke with as much ardent contempt of his character,

as though the amplest information warranted the sentiment.

Somewhat vexed by the prospect of being frequently obliged to discuss the interests of his ward, with a man for whom he felt neither respect nor esteem, he proceeded across the court which divided that part of the palazzo where his sister resided, from the quarter appropriated to his own use.

Having passed through some intervening saloons, he entered the room where he was told, Prince Angelo awaited him. He had thrown open the door rather abruptly and entered; his eyes elevated by that supercilious indifference, with which rash youth sometimes braves the opinion of graver experience: he flashed them for an instant over the Prince's figure, but the next moment they sought the same object again, and an expression of agreeable surprise displaced the haughtiness with which he had prepared to advance.

Valombrosa's imagination was so apt to exaggerate every description of places and persons, that he rarely found any resemblance between objects and their portraits, when he had an opportunity of comparing them; he was therefore, subject to sudden revolutions of opinion; and being keenly alive to the charm of noble or interesting expression, he never saw either, without yielding willingly to their influence.

In the present instance, both causes operated to produce an instant revulsion of feeling. He had imagined Prince Angelo a stern, self-adulating person, of a forbidding appearance; instead of which, he saw a man with manners modestly embarrassed, and a countenance full of moral and intellectual beauty.

The Prince immediately entered upon the business he came to discuss, in a low and steady voice; but it was a voice only to be equalled in urbanity, by the smile which occasionally accompanied its sound.

During their long discussion, Valombrosa fancied he now and then saw this smile tinctured with a sort of pity very humiliating to its object, and at first he felt indignant: but a repetition of the smile made him question himself whether or not it were deserved; and he then discovered, that it properly marked some expression of prejudice or passion in *his* conversation.

Such a discovery was not calculated to revive the arrogant feeling which Prince Angelo's appearance had subdued; and Valombrosa's usual frank temerity of assertion, gradually softened into amiable self-mistrust.

The Prince, in his turn, by degrees, spoke with less brevity and hesitation. He seemed to see that Valombrosa's prejudices, though as thick as weeds, had as little root, and sprung from a soil capable of bearing the noblest harvests. He warmed, therefore, into an earnestness of reasoning, and a patience of ex-

planation, which captivated both the attention and the good-will of his hearer; and before they parted, his offending smile had but one expression, that of kindly interest.

The surprise of Rosalia and Ippolita when Valombrosa returned to them, and gave way to the change Prince Angelo had wrought in his sentiments, was only equalled by their secret admiration of that ingenuous spirit which urged Valombrosa so freely to condemn his former prejudice.

This frank confession of error, was made in the true spirit of generous compunction; for he sought no qualifying excuse. He even refused to remember the variety of persons whose circumstantial scandals might be said to have authorised his prejudice.

Jealous of her brother's perfection, Rosalia insisted upon placing the blame on those målignant individuals in whom such stories had originated.

"Ah, my sweet sister!" exclaimed Valombrosa, "if I am not a wilful calumniator, I have at least proved myself a fool. One of those credulous, tale-repeating fools, who are at once the dupes and the instruments of craftier men. And who shall say which of these characters does the most mischief? If the malicious man had not the fool for his emissary, scarcely one slander out of a thousand would live beyond an hour."

"And what in one interview can so entirely have disproved these stories against Prince Angelo?" asked Ippolita, raising her thoughtful eyes for an instant. "Are pleasing manners, a noble air, and an intellectual countenance, undeviating evidences of a good heart?"

"With me they are, I fear, nearly always," replied Valombrosa ingenuously. "But I know that is one of the vices of my nature; a shoot from the same root of credulity which makes me believe whatever is confidently asserted:—it is

so impossible to imagine half the world liars!—But I think in the present instance I am not the dupe of my own easiness. Prince Angelo was described to me as morose and ill-bred, caring for no one but himself, with a stone in his breast instead of a heart, and no one excellence in the world, but a powerful mind, which he cultivated to excess, solely to give him the better excuse for despising the rest of mankind. I see him; I converse with him; and I find him with a countenance expressive of remarkable sweetness, with conciliating manners, with a marvellous patience of contradiction and error; and instead of that arrogant disdain of inferior acquirements which was laid to his charge, with the modest embarrassment of a man who doubts his own powers, or who has reached that eminence of wisdom which only shows him 'the Alps on Alps' beyond."

"I think you are not very far from

that eminence yourself, my dear Orlando," whispered Rosalia.

"Certainly not; if the proof is, that I see myself over-topped by two-thirds of my acquaintance!" replied Valombrosa gaily. "But I must return to what I was saying to the Signora Ippolita. Now is it not fair to presume, that the same envy or ignorance has misrepresented his moral qualities, which has so glaringly falsified his manners and appearance? And against all the presumptive evidences I have just adduced in his favour, we have only to balance a few sallies of ridicule at his pedantry and severe morals; and a string of ill-natured suppositions on the cause of his domestic misery, uttered by men who either knew him superficially, or were unable to comprehend him, or felt their self-love stung by his superiority. I see the inference against myself which must be drawn from this, Signora, by that kindly-downcast eye of your's. But you may look at me,

and see that I really do colour with shame at my past illiberality. I hope it has taught me a lesson for life."

"A fault thus nobly redeemed ——" began Ippolita, her beautiful face suffusing, in spite of herself, with the sentiment that warmed her heart; she did not trust herself to finish the sentence; for now a keen pang of regret that she could be nothing hereafter to him she admired so justly, shot through her breast, and banished from her cheek the colouring of tenderness and joy.

But Valombrosa, thrilling with the tone in which she had spoken those few words, saw not the change. He resumed. "One half of the persons who retailed these tales about Prince Angelo, doubtless did it upon as slight grounds as I believed them: for I never had the sense or the justice to seek out the few individuals who *did* know the Prince's history and character, and learn from them whether he were indeed a proud cynic, or

one fled with a wound in his heart from the cruel world where he had received it."

"But where are you to find such persons, my dear Orlando?" asked Rosalia.

"In his immediate neighbourhood, my sister. You see his neighbours must have discovered him to be benevolent and trust-worthy, or he would not have been appointed by a father to the guardianship of his son. I confess that in our conversation to-day, I saw in him what must make common worldly minds, hostile to him. I mean, a broad principle of justice, which will not allow itself to be trenched on, either by private friendship or popular odium. He developed this in his arguments against my tenacious adherence to an opposite principle; — you see what a *wise* brother you have, Rosalia! — and I was surprised, instructed, and convinced at the same instant."

"Nay, Orlando, you slander yourself!" exclaimed his sister with sweet vehemence.

"I would I did! but as I must make full confession of this folly, to my own conscience, 'tis fit I rêhearse it to you, for *your* instruction; I have hitherto gone headlong in the service of whatever person engaged me, like a hireling soldier, making it my point of honour, to fight it out to the last, even though suspecting the cause not a good one. — To keep my word — to serve a friend — to enrich a beggar, sanctified my actions in my own opinion. Now I would not convince myself, that my little ward had a very doubtful title to the mines Rossano's ward contests; and after he had demonstrated the vexatious truth, in amicable discourse, I was at first angrily resolved to carry the matter into the court, hoping that some trick of law might preserve it to the poor child. If she loses it, she loses the chief part of her income; while the rich Luigi, gains what he has no

want of. I confess the natural injustice of this, chafed me; and I had the intemperance to accuse Prince Angelo of cruelty in the discharge of his duty. He bore the outrage with the patience of a saint; and after I had exhaled myself in a volume of idle declamation, he calmly took up the argument."

"And what could he say in vindication of so hard a proceeding?" asked the tender Rosalia.

"The plain truth, my sweet sister, in much better language than I can remember. In short, having simply protested the unwillingness with which he executed a painful duty, he proved to me that having accepted the guardianship of this child, he was as religiously bound to regain for him, if possible, what had been improperly withheld, as to preserve for him what he actually possessed: and having thus distinctly defined his own duty, Prince Angelo pointed out mine. He convinced me, that society depends

upon every man's conviction that its laws require him to yield others their rights, in order that he may thus entitle himself to the protection of his own: and that whatever violence we may put upon our private partiality, or gratitude, or compassionate feelings, the broad principle of even-handed justice must in no case be given up. When I told him that Leonora would be reduced to comparative indigence, his countenance changed; at length he said—"In four years, my ward will attain majority; you may be sure I will not lose the advantage of the intervening time, to instruct him in the duties of humanity! *she* has her laws not less commanding than those of justice, and I hope he will freely obey them. Meanwhile, I have not much to do with money in the way I live; you are rich, and I am sure generous; and between us, we may partly make up your protegée's loss."

"O amiable! excellent man!" cried Rosalia, tears starting into her eyes.

"Now indeed," exclaimed Ippolita, with animation, "you prove to us that Prince Angelo has been ill understood in Tuscany."

"We may all judge more leisurely," returned Valombrosa, "for I have invited the Prince to *Il bel Deserto*; so you will have an opportunity of comparing my impressions, with the man himself."

Ippolita started, and Valombrosa thought, looked disturbed; but after an instant's bend of her expressive brow, an instant's fixture of her meditative eye, her countenance relaxed, and her thoughts returned to their first bias; she said pensively, "I fear, my friends, you must think I have a cold heart waiting upon a colder judgment: but a life like mine" — she stopt, and cast her eyes upwards with a look which said, "only Heaven can tell the sad experience I have had, that neither looks, nor sentiments, nay nor principles, can be relied on; actions alone, are the test of man's integrity!"

Ippolita had indeed known a sad variety of wretchedness. Associated with the fate of exiles, she had seen friendship after friendship, bursting like bubbles under the touch: she had found professions faithless; principles themselves failing at the moment of trial; fidelity presumptuous; the benefactor becoming the tyrant; and even family union, broken by calamity into selfish and separate interests. She had seen all this, she had felt all this, and there were times when the keen recollection of past disappointments made her forget that she was now in the very arms of disinterested, affectionate, benevolence!

Her eyes surcharged with tears, remained fixed in mournful thought. Valombrosa said with great emotion, "you should see my heart, Signora, to know how I estimate that judgment, and how" —he stopt, changed colour, began again to speak, then checking himself, broke off off, with a look of penetrating devotedness.

Ippolita mastered the conscious, rebellious sigh, which rose to echo the expression of Valombrosa's glance; she turned towards Rosalia and said, "I confess myself anxious not to be misunderstood by either of my friends. I would fain have them believe, that though my heart has been crushed, it will always spring to meet goodness and affection. I hope it is not poisoned by suspicion, though it no longer dare surrender itself to belief, without proof, in all the virtues it wishes to find. Here every thing is certainty, delightful certainty; and my heart glows with equal confidence, equal gratitude for you both."

Rosalia and Valombrosa took the hand Ippolita extended to each, with very different feelings: the latter retained her hand in his, but without venturing to press it even in sign of cordial thanks; for what she said, had chilled his hopes.

"I have been told," resumed Ippolita, making an effort to strike a decisive

stroke, "that my character has none of the materials of love in it; it would be woeful for me if it had. But I trust you will both feel that it is only the better adapted for sincere, unchanging devoted friendship; and that neither of you will regard me the less kindly, because I never yield myself long, to the guidance of deceitful imagination."

As she ended, Valombrosa suffered her hand to drop from his: her pointed expression of voice, of countenance, was not to be mistaken; he saw what was to be the future limit of his expectations. "I understand you, madam!" he said, in accents so low that Rosalia did not hear him, and rising with an air of equal respect and dejection, left the apartment.

At that moment, how did the stricken heart of the self-immolated Ippolita yearn to pour out its bleeding tenderness, even at his feet!

Immediately after this scene, the little party began their journey to *Il bel Deserto.* Valombrosa rode apart; and during his solitary progress, had leisure for many reflections. He set out with the determination of being completely miserable; but ere he reached *Il bel Deserto,* hope had revived, his sanguine spirit had risen from its sudden overthrow with renewed strength. — It is so impossible for the evidences of tenderness, (even though purposely obscured) to be hidden from the watchful eyes of a lover; and so impossible for the lover to imagine that any thing but happiness and union can follow mutual attachment! — Alas, why is such fond augury so rarely justified by the event!

When she reached *Il bel Deserto,* Ippolita's animated admiration of a residence which had been erected under his own eye, and embellished by his taste, finished the destruction of Valombrosa' despondency.

As he led her through the house and the wood-walks, at every burst of the splendid landscape her admiration outran his questions; and the same sentiments flowed from her lips which beat in his heart, and kindled upon his countenance. Again and again he repeated to himself with the intoxication of hope, "Oh it is impossible that our sympathy is to end here!"

Ippolita could not blind herself to the meaning of his illuminated eyes, and it cost her many a severe struggle to preserve tranquillity in her's.

But an imperious duty called on her for exertion; and had she hesitated sacrificing the delight of still beating in every pulse of the generous Valombrosa's heart, she would have considered herself at once a traitor to Rosalia, and an ingrate to him.

The one painful secret which oppressed her, and which when told, must convince him that he ought to tear her image

from his heart, would soon, she believed, be revealed to him by another.

She had long waited for permission from those she was bound to obey, to reveal this burthensome secret; and now accident was about to anticipate their consent, or to render their refusal vain.

Ippolita remembered to have seen a Prince Rossano among the many Neapolitans who came to learn at the camp of the French, the situation of their relations in France. It is true, she was then but sixteen; and five subsequent years of conflict with the world, might have changed her beyond his recollection. Besides, it was possible, the Prince she knew of that name, might not be the same person that Valombrosa had invited to *Il bel Deserto*.

But anxious to be released from the yoke of concealment, she tried to hope that Prince Angelo was the man she had known, and that he would openly recognise her; by doing so, he would afford

Valombrosa an instant and honourable explanation of her apparent ingratitude to his generous passion.

In this hope, Ippolita wrested her thoughts from her own situation, and fixed them upon the privations and the patience of her youthful companion.

It was sweet to repose the mind upon such an object: it was comforting to see how ingeniously the human heart makes to itself a new species of pleasure, when customary ones are withdrawn: it was edifying to behold the heaviest of afflictions, borne with a cheerfulness, conquered and preserved by many a contest!

" I am in *Il bel Deserto*, among our beautiful Appenines!" cried Rosalia, the first evening they sat together under the open portico which looked down the valley.

The sun had just sunk among a pomp of gorgeous clouds, which still filled the west with that amethystine glow peculiar to Italy: — the majestic pageant of that

western sky was slowly passing away, beyond the long vista of mountains that opened before them. Golden gleams yet lingered on the wood tops; while the dewy freshness of the air brightened their vernal green, extracting and wafting aromatic perfumes.

Rosalia felt the tranquillity, and coolness, and fragrance, and she fancied the beauty of the scene. She spoke, too, in so animated a tone, that a stranger following the ineffectual movement of her soft blue eyes, might have believed that her sense, as well as her heart, took in the glorious prospect.

"Oh, my Rosalia!" cried Valombrosa, his feelings escaping controul; "why cannot you share this magnificent scene with your brother!"

A slight emotion tinged the cheek of Rosalia; momentary tears suffused her eyes, but shaking them away, she said cheerfully, "I do see it, dear Orlando, in imagination, in memory, and what is

better, I feel it in my heart; it is better to feel than to see, is it not?—and had I been like others of my age, I must have gone into crowds—foolish, dissipated crowds. I should then have learned to prize mere pleasure; I might have grown vain and frivolous, and dead to every solid good; and then I should have seen all the wonders of creation and felt them not. No! I had rather have my spirit see, than my eyes."

Valombrosa clapsed her for an instant to his breast, and when he released her, Ippolita saw his face was moistened by tears.—How lovely were those tears in her eyes!

He rose without speaking, and escaping from the delicate grasp of his sister, hurried away to recover himself.

"Sweet Rosalia," said Ippolita, as he departed, "I could almost envy you the privilege of exciting such holy joy, as was expressed in that silent embrace of your brother! I am convinced that

nothing gives him such happiness, as beholding you so resigned."

"I was not always so, my dear monitress," replied Rosalia, "but reflecting upon your harder fate, has taught me the easiness of mine. My task has only been submission, your's, struggling for others; hoping, fearing, suffering in vain; losing what you toiled for; alone and desolate.—Could I contrast two such fates, yet remain a querulous mourner?"

"Well then, we will simply acknowledge to each other, that we endeavour to do our duty," said Ippolita, "for such it is, let us poor mortals be ever so inclined to dignify well-doing, with loftier epithets. I will ever balance against the trials of *my* fate, the remembrance of moments like this; the recollection of such friendship and such excellence as Rosalia's and her brother's; while *you* may greatly weigh against *any* privation, the possession of such a brother!"

Rosalia's artless heart thrilled at the

unusual tone of Ippolita's voice. That exquisite sensibility to every shade of sound, peculiar to the blind, made her perceive in its fullest extent, the emotion with which Ippolita spoke; her wishes gave but one meaning to that emotion; yet too delicate for comment, she kissed her friend's cheek, gratefully whispering, "gladly do I acknowledge this, every time I kneel before the blessed Cross. No lover, no husband, will ever be mine, to rival that dear brother in *my* affections, and it is delicious to think so; but I would willingly have him give *me* a rival. I hope he will marry."

Rosalia, aware that she could not trace the effect of this speech upon the face of Ippolita, with such innocent cunning as we sometimes observe in a child, gently passed her arm round her friend's waist, and rested her hand upon her left side.

The feeling in the heart within, was too intense for tumult. The image presented by Rosalia, seemed to realize

instantly, what Ippolita had hitherto contemplated only in idea, and as a thing remote; it was not a struggle therefore, but a sacrifice; and the heart which is making a great sacrifice, does not throb.

Reading the master passion only in the pages of the poets, Rosalia was not able to discover any thing by her manœuvre; she removed her hand with a sigh of disappointment, as Ippolita said, with forced composure, "of course your brother will marry; and when I am far from Florence, I shall hope to hear that he has given you a sister quite worthy of him."

O, how many things do we say without meaning them, as if we sought to cheat our very selves! Ippolita's heart smote her for that insincere hope; and she might have added something that would have betrayed the truth, had not the reappearance of Valombrosa, given a fortunate interruption to her feelings.

The ensuing day was spent by Ippolita,

in admiration of the scene in which she was placed.

The house itself contained fewer books, pictures, and statues, than the palace at Florence: but whether these were better selected, or that their limited number gave greater leisure for examination, she knew not; but she felt a more lively glow of mental pleasure, in the portico and gallery of *Il bel Deserto*, than ever she did amongst the interminable magnificence of the Palazzo Valombrosa.

The vestibule, which was indeed only a wider continuation of the portico, was surrounded by antique statues of the most exquisite sculpture: the gallery contained historical pictures by Raphael; and the ornaments of Rosalia's cabinet, were a collection of the portraits of illustrious men, by Da Vinci and Giorgione.

Her bath, fantastically wrought in imitation of a sea nymph's grotto, was prettily garlanded with representations

of aquatic plants, and decorated by groupes of appropriate statuary.

But Valombrosa's was of a simpler taste: its plain marble sides, polished like mirrors, reflected only one statue; the perfect figure of a Narcissus; which, bending enamoured over the clear water, seemed gazing on the soft uncertain reflection, which undulated below.

In such a scene, manly beauty might learn to scorn itself, by comparison with the divine proportions of this unrivalled boast of Grecian art: or if nature's hand had marvellously triumphed over the sculptor's chissel, might at least be taught, that he who fixes his eye upon his animal nature, perishes without the "fair posterity of illustrious deeds."

Ippolita was not soon weary of studying the pictures in the gallery, and the statues in the vestibule: each object there, was full of instruction to her whose reflective mind pondered upon

every event of life, and every variety of human character.

By comparing these delineations of the passions, with her own observation of those passions in real scenes, she doubled the first great effect of the master's genius: and while she looked on that unearthly perfection which Grecian artists have given to human proportions, she believed she saw the model of man, such as he was created in God's own image, before sin and sorrow sullied his original brightness.

CHAPTER VIII.

HAVING accustomed themselves to sup in the open air, since their residence at *Il bel Deserto*, Valombrosa and Rosalia were sitting with Ippolita, embosomed among myrtles, and lulled by the far-off sound of fountains in the gardens, when a page announced Prince Angelo Rossano. Valombrosa hastened to welcome him.

As he presented the Prince to his sister, and the Signora Martello, Ippolita involuntarily drew back. At the first glance, she recognized Rossano; but as he bowed to her with his eyes down, she could not guess whether he might or might not recollect her.

They seated themselves; and the prince obeying Rosalia's courteous in-

treaty that he would taste the fruit on their table, fell into discourse with her immediately.

Ippolita had then leisure for observing his countenance. How well did she remember him, even after so many years! and how many agonising recollections were associated with his image! She recalled the buoyant hopes and succeeding alarms of the period in which they had last met; and having lived to find that both those hopes and fears had failed of their accomplishment, inwardly ejaculated, "Man, indeed, disquieteth himself in vain."

Time had dealt kindly with Prince Angelo; for the same expression of outraged affection, which marked his brow five years before, was now softened into a contemplative seriousness.

While perusing his countenance, Ippolita could not blame the enthusiasm of Valombrosa; and she gave him a glance

which expressed as much. He spoke to her, and she was obliged to answer.

At the sound of her peculiar voice, as of one familiar in other days, the Prince hastily raised his eyes. He did not start, but he looked sadly and earnestly at her.

When Ippolita turned pale, it was from her lips that the bright red disappeared: her clear cheek had not often a tint to lose. Her whole face was now completely devoid of colour, so that it was impossible for a stranger not to be struck with her agitation. Prince Angelo saw it, stifled a long-drawn sigh, and looked down again in silence.

Valombrosa, who observed the fixed gaze of the one, and the disturbance of the other, felt at first, he knew not what wild fancy; but quickly banishing it, he concluded that Rossano had found some resemblance to his faithless wife in the beauty of Ippolita, and that so determined a gaze, confused her modesty.

Anxious to relieve them both, he engaged the Prince in immediate conversation. Ippolita gradually recovered her self-possession during their discourse; and at last, as Rossano, either by accident or design, never suffered his eyes to meet her's again, she insensibly found refuge from the spectres of the past his appearance had raised, in listening to the subjects discussed. They were interesting in themselves, and derived additional attraction from the agreeably contrasted characters of the speakers.

Valombrosa, eloquent, frank, and ardent, urged on his remarks with an adventurous enthusiasm; which eager in the pursuit of some favourite theory, hazarded the boldest novelties of opinion, without fear of ridicule.

Prince Angelo, calm, meditative, and slow of speech, proceeded leisurely to separate and arrange, and then to examine the splendid assertions of his companion. The steady light of truth brightened his

temperate language; it never dazzled like the flash of Valombrosa's lively fancy; but it warmed and it guided.

Valombrosa's conversation was enriched by numberless graces of taste and imagination; Prince Angelo's had but one striking ornament; — Perspicuity.

But under that Doric plainness, what profound depths of thought and feeling were concealed! what an intimate acquaintance with the hearts of others! what severe study of his own! what philosophic indifference to all the vain distinctions of life!

Ippolita, long accustomed to the society of distinguished minds, felt breathing her native atmosphere; and Valombrosa frequently appealing to her, drew her into replies, which, however modestly delivered, marked her acquaintance with the subject under discussion, and her desire of completer information. Prince Angelo rejoined with the respectful surprise of one astonished to find

something like equality of intellect in a woman.

Rosalia never ventured to speak; but she listened with intelligent attention: her sweet countenance now animated with her brother's vivacity, now fixed in awful reverence of Prince Angelo's graver reason.

Valombrosa read her feelings on her cheek, and he prolonged the instructive themes, till fresher night breezes reminded him of her bodily health.

For the first few steps Rossano walked by the side of Valombrosa, who was conducting his sister towards the house; then falling behind, the Prince drew close to Ippolita, and said in a low voice, "Your secret is safe, Signora; I require no explanation." He then addressed something aloud to Valombrosa, which inducing the latter to turn, Ippolita found they must all form one party, and that consequently no opportunity was left her

of acknowledging the well-meant courtesy of Rossano.

As they pursued their way, she could not help silently regretting that delicate politeness which had restrained the natural burst of surprise on her first introduction to him. Had the discovery she wished, been made then, no self-reproach could have followed: but now to bid him make it, would be only to put a miserable cheat upon her conscience. Yet how much did she languish for the solace of being clearly understood by Valombrosa! and how was she tempted to envy man his privilege of frankly explaining every tender impulse checked, and every sacrifice yielded, when commanded so to check and so to yield, by principles which honour him who acts on them!

Prince Angelo's visit was prolonged from day to day, as much by his own inclination as by the importunities of all at *Il bel Deserto.* In Valombrosa and Ip-

polita he found minds, if not cast in the same mould with his own, formed of the same sterling ore. While retracing with them the records of past ages, or following the erratic course of human philosophy in its search after truth and happiness; or while contrasting that erring philosophy with the revelation of all it sought, in the divine doctrines of our Redeemer, he felt that our intellectual pleasures are not destined for solitary gratification. In correcting the prejudices, or restraining the imagination of Valombrosa, he found the use of what he had himself learned; and as Valombrosa's ingenuous nature won upon his affections, he became interested in the control of that impetuous temper, and quick sensibility, which might hereafter make him an instrument to be played on at will by others.

Self-condemned to a life of retirement and abstraction, Rossano had mastered the anguish of domestic treachery by re-

solutely devoting himself to study. He knew that if his heart's wound were ever to heal, it must avoid the possibility of a touch; and if he would preserve that heart from future wounds, he must never let it enter again amongst the press of human passions.

In consequence of these reflections, he avoided every intimacy that might lead him further than general benevolence. Individual attachment, he thought he should never feel more: and he believed it would be wiser not to indulge such an inclination; be it love, or be it friendship. But after a long period wasted in that vacuity of the soul which follows the paroxysms of outraged affection, sensibility revives, and yearns for exercise; emotion becomes a want; and the being formed to enjoy and to suffer, once more yields to the impulse which hurries him on, to his destiny of tears.

Rossano had reached this critical state of mind when he became acquainted

with Valombrosa. The nobleness and candour he found in that young man, rendered his faults interesting; (for these lay upon the surface;) and he yielded unconsciously to that particular interest. He was prompted also to seek his intimacy, by that general weariness of a hopeless life, which never fails to prey upon characters naturally inclined to the social affections.

Valombrosa had a choice collection of ancient MSS. at *Il bel Deserto*, and as fine a selection of statues. He invited Prince Angelo thither, for the purpose of animating his own moderate ardour for the philosophy contained in the former; while he should teach the Prince how to admire the beauties of the latter.

Rossano accepted the challenge; much more disposed to the first than to the last part of his promised entertainment. He believed, perhaps too justly, that if man were to cultivate his understanding more

and his taste less, he would be a gainer on the score of happiness.

Prince Angelo's intellectual enjoyments at Valombrosa's villa went far beyond his expectations; and these he dreaded not: but it was on the awakening of his sensibility, that he found the time was come for him to retreat.

Could the severest philosophy deaden a heart naturally tender, and trusting, and true, to the delight of admiring such perfect union between brother and sister; between the benefactor and the obliged? Could all that dismal experience taught, fortify him against the pity inspired by the youth, beauty, and misfortune of Rosalia?

Rossano had been a father; and though he lost his only child while yet an infant, he had felt all the tender transports of that sacred character. Rosalia's touching dependance on those around her; her artless sweetness, her mind eager for instruction, even her flower-like delicacy,

were so many points of resemblance with charming childhood. Rossano contemplated her with more than a father's softness, and soon with almost a father's solicitude. He loved to listen to her, to encourage her bashful mind in its timid efforts to follow the ascent of others; and at every lovely sentiment or original idea this encouragement elicited, his breast glowed with pleasurable exultation.

Rosalia, in return, delighted in the gentle tones of the Prince's voice; and, fond of prostrating her own mind before that of whomever she loved, completely enjoyed this bias in the society of Rossano.

His ascendancy over her, soon became superior even to that of Ippolita; or else he exercised it with less scruple. For in one conversation he convinced her of the absurdity of charms and amulets, (then the current wonders of the age,) and

completely routed the graver absurdities of judicial astrology. From that moment Rosalia discarded her blood-stone ring, and never again spoke of her destiny and the stars as inseparably connected.

Prince Angelo struggled and staid, from week to week; then ashamed of his acquiescence in the growing influence of new friends, he tore himself from them, and returned to his cave, as he called his residence in the wood of Camaldoli.

In less than another week, Valombrosa found arguments to bring him back; and conceding with a good grace to his own weakness, Rossano finally surrendered himself up to friendship and *Il bel Deserto*, for the whole summer.

During the Prince's short absence, Ippolita received the long-expected letter from her kinsman: its contents overwhelmed her with distress. New misfortunes had overtaken that beloved person; new difficulties opposed her de-

parture from the only friends likely to shelter her: and yet, an additional motive was added to her generous wish to leave them.

She was perplexed and agonized; and her reason, troubled for the first time in her life by that tender sentiment which often humbles the proudest intellect, was unable to direct her steps.

She looked round for a confidential friend; for one who, knowing part of her history already, might be entrusted with it all, without infringing that secrecy, which alas! involved the safety of many.

Dare I, she asked herself, seek that friend in Prince Angelo Rossano?

It is true, he had scrupulously avoided further reference to that brief recognition, which followed their introduction; but this avoidance seemed less to arise from indifference, than from delicacy, and respect for the cause of her mystery.

She not unfrequently found him look-

ing at her with an air of kind commiseration, and had still oftener to thank him for having turned the conversation, when accidentally tending towards subjects which he knew must afflict her to hear discussed.

These considerations, and a series of observations upon his conduct to others, warranted her in taking the bold step of asking his advice and assistance; for it was now her purpose to quit Tuscany immediately.

It was among her intentions, not even to conceal from him, that her desire of leaving the shelter she now enjoyed, arose principally from the fear of injuring her benefactor's peace. The confession might fix on her the imputation of vanity, if Rossano had not discerned the prepossession of his friend; but Ippolita was not to be intimidated from the path of rectitude, by the fear of ridicule, or even the certainty of being mis-judged; her heart was too full of deep and press-

ing anxieties for another, to waste much feeling upon herself: never yet had she struggled, hoped, or feared, for any selfish aim.

Prince Angelo came back when the gardens of *Il bel Deserto* were one blush of roses.

Rosalia, something less blooming, but equally lovely, was roving through those charming thickets, enjoying their delicious fragrance, gathering their dewy flowers, and thanking Heaven that if "pleasure, at one avenue, were quite shut out," others remained, and were heightened by the absence of sight.

"The roses smell so exquisitely sweet this morning," she said, "the air feels so balmy, I hear the cheerful hum of the insects so distinctly, that it seems as if my nerves were just now, particularly tuned for happiness. I hope the Prince will not disappoint us! when he is come, — with you, my Orlando, you, my Ippolita,

I shall indeed have happiness — and I would have it to-day; for I never before, felt so capable of being quite happy."

"Be thy dear heart, all bliss, then!" exclaimed her brother, looking forward, "for here *is* Rossano!"

Not all the roses round, could at that moment out-blush the cheek of Rosalia: but it was only the innocent colouring of delighted surprise, which painted her fair face.

"Oh, you are come back to us!" she cried, extending her hand, which the Prince did not take, though he looked at her most kindly. He smiled as he answered; "I had no choice. I found my studies full as much disturbed by the remembrance of my friends here, as they could be by their seducing society; so methought, if I am to have the evil without the good at Camaldoli, it is far better to return, and take the good with the evil, at *Il bel Deserto.*

"Said with true philosophic contempt of female vanity!" observed Valombrosa, gaily.

"Surely there was a refined compliment couched under it," observed Ippolita, "we all admit that there is more glory in subduing the rebel that contends, than in leading a crowd of willing slaves!"

"Oh," said Rosalia, "Prince Angelo shall not persuade me that he did not come willingly to a place, where he knows himself esteemed and reverenced. It is so sweet, to believe ourself the source of happiness, but to *one* person! then how much more delightful is it, to give happiness to three persons, as he does here?"

"Happiness! sweet Rosalia!" repeated the Prince with gloomy energy, "that is such a comprehensive word. And you apply it to a few pleasurable emotions! — charming while enjoyed perhaps, but when withdrawn, not mis-

sed! bright summer blossoms shaken from the bough they grow on, season after season, and the tree still standing in strength and beauty! — Happiness is the vital moisture of the root; it is the principle of life and vigour, which ascends through all its branches, and crowns it with verdure; *that* destroyed, the tree falls: or stands through wearisome years, a blighted, useless thing — as I am."

Rossano uttered the last words with an inward breath; but his countenance struggled with some powerful emotion, and he pressed his hand upon his eyes.

An embarrassed silence followed; it was the first time the Prince had referred to his own fate, and for the first time that each of his surrounding friends felt they durst mingle pity with the respect he inspired.

Rosalia's tender heart beat sorrowfully during that agitating silence: the glow faded from her cheek, and her downcast eyes dropt tears among the gathered roses

which she now unconsciously pulled to pieces in the basket that hung upon her arm.

Recovering from his weakness, Angelo fixed an earnest gaze on those moistened, unconscious eyes; and catching a look of Valombrosa's, attempted to smile: it was a smile disdainful of his own feebleness! then combating the painful recollections which pressed on him, he paused in his walk, and proposed avoiding the increasing heat, in the shade of the portico.

As the little party retrod their steps, a strong expression of keenly remembered wrongs, remained upon his countenance. Rosalia's pitying fancy imaged the looks she could not see; Valombrosa reflected on them with serious concern; Ippolita studied them with anxiety to learn whether all were consistent in the character she was about to try with her confidence.

Observing Rossano in this point of view, she admitted that his countenance expressed only the indignant swell of a

noble heart which feels defrauded of its most valuable years by the bosom friend on whom it rested. She had never heard Rossano breathe one sentence against this faithless wife; and well did she know *that it is* not the injurer who forbears to accuse. Perhaps hereafter, he might give vent to his suppressed complaints, in the arms of friendship; but it was evident that neither the wish of being fairly estimated by others, nor the sting of remembered injury, could extort from him any bitterness of accusation, even among persons he cordially esteemed.

When they had returned to the house, Rossano took up a book and read aloud, while the ladies pursued their different kinds of work, and Valombrosa designed arabesques for his sister's summer-house.

Thus employed, tranquillity soon appeared on the brow of Prince Angelo; and for the remainder of the evening his conversation was more than usually fruitful in variety and interest.

Time was escaping fast, and each day now left an additional weight on the heart of Ippolita; for no opportunity had occurred in which she could obtain the private ear of Rossano. To move without his assistance, she thought impossible, without involving perhaps characters and lives dearer to her than her own. But accident one day produced what she had so long sought in vain. Valombrosa was gone on business to Florence; Rosalia retired to her customary siesta; and Ippolita, invited by the deep mass of foliage, and consequent coolness which surrounded the Naiads grotto, went thither to breathe a fresher air. She started on seeing the Prince thrown along the ground by the side of the clear-bubbling water.

There was an expression of profound thought on his brow, while he rose at her entrance. Ippolita's heart throbbed powerfully, but she determined not to lose the opportunity.

"I disturb some philosophic meditation," she said apprehensively, yet not retiring.

"If self-examination make part of philosophy, (as I suppose it does,) you certainly do," replied the Prince pensively smiling; — "yet perhaps I am giving a high-sounding name, to a merely idle mood: however, I *fancied* myself so far advanced in self-arraignment, that I believe I am not sorry to have so fair an excuse for giving up so disagreeable a duty."

"I should not suspect that any duty is disagreeable to Prince Angelo!" observed Ippolita, almost irresolute whether to stay or go.

"You mistake me then!" replied Rossano profoundly sighing, "I have found some very disagreeable; others, very difficult. The sacrifice of a fierce thirst for vengeance, for instance — when my own heart cried aloud — nay the whole world called aloud — and God and conscience

only" — he interrupted himself. "What weakness this! to think and talk of events that are forgotten; and feelings, which I have conquered!"

His look and voice testified the rebellion of that memory and that heart, which he fancied so obedient.

Ippolita faltered a little. "Then does your severe philosophy interdict the comfort of friendly counsel? I admit with you the vanity of useless lamentation; but distressed and doubtful, and not knowing how I ought to act, in most trying circumstances, I confess my soul languishes for a friend to advise and guide me. Prince, you already know part of my history — dare I think" — she paused, and a momentary throb of high self-respect made her hesitate to pronounce the appeal which might be expected from "one, out of suits with fortune."

Rossano's manner immediately changed; it became earnest, but gentle: for the first time since their acquaintance he took

her hand. She had observed his great personal reserve towards women, and that general habit gave important meaning to an action otherwise trivial.

"I do not interdict either the consolations or the confidence of friendship;" he said in a tone of suppressed emotion, "there is a legitimate aim in confidence, when the person who makes it, does so for the purpose of seeking counsel: and by occasionally calling upon our fellow-creatures for sympathy with our sorrows, we brighten the chain which connects and binds society. It is permitted us to relieve our oppressed hearts, but not to weaken them, or burthen others uselessly: we must ever be careful not to exceed that lawful measure of complaint. Since you and I first met, Signora, we have both suffered. I see it in *your* face — *I* feel it here! — if my advice and sympathy can serve you, command them. I was not always, the stern Solitary you see me now."

Ippolita raised her brimming eyes to thank him, and saw that his were suffused with tears. "He loved his faithless wife!" she said inwardly — "he loves her still."

Obeying the respectful impulse of his hand, she sat down by him on the mossy projections of the grotto near its entrance, where the light foliage of a young ash tree threw its checquering shadows into the opening.

Ippolita's own sorrows now pressed heavily on her heart. "And to what may I attribute this generous —" she spoke with emotion, "in Naples, Prince, you saw me only once, and that in a sort of court; you see me now under the roof of a Florentine; a wandering outcast, with an assumed name; has not that deception shocked and offended your just principles?"

"It surprised me, I confess," replied Rossano, "Valombrosa, when inviting me to *Il bel Deserto*, after describing

his interesting sister, spoke of her friend, and detailed the affecting circumstances under which you had become known to him. I came prepared to see one who however personally admirable, owed nothing to the accidents of birth and fortune; and my astonishment was certainly very great, when in the orphan of the obscure Martello, I saw the daughter of Piero di Medici. Your motive for concealment need not be explained to me; in Florence, that name acknowledged, might have caused your destruction; or rendered it treasonable in your present friends to give you shelter."

"I would have braved my own danger," said Ippolita, with energy, "rather than have endured the shame and the pain of falsehood; but my conduct was determined by others; and I had no choice. While my generous preserver knows me as no other than Ippolita *Martello*, I trust, he is safe!" She sighed, —paused— then resumed— "To make

you master of my present difficulties, I must weary you with many particulars."

"You will not weary me," answered Rossano, in a tone which could not be doubted.

Ippolita resumed.

"When my grandfather, Lorenzo the Magnificent, was all-powerful here, you well know that his generous policy extended all over Italy: it was the aim of his life, so to reconcile and connect the several independent states, as to make them resist with one will, and with one movement, the ambitious attempts of France and Germany on the general liberty. For this purpose, he had to watch that short-sighted policy which too often tempted one Italian power to aggrandize itself at the expense of its neighbour; and by that act, destroying the nicely-balanced equilibrium which he had so carefully adjusted. In the year 1486, my grandfather particularly opposed himself to the enormous increase of temporal power

which the Pope was then aiming at, by his invasion of Naples: you must have heard, in later years, how much its king was indebted to my ancestor at that critical moment."

"I know that the country and its Prince owed their preservation to your grandfather," observed Rossano.

Ippolita acknowledged the tribute with an inclination of her head, and took up her narrative.

"My father, then just beginning to take part in the business of life though scarcely passed boyhood, was sent on secret missions in the behalf of Naples, to Milan and to Venice. In the latter city, he became enamoured of Laura Alviano; a daughter of one of the extraordinary and celebrated race of that name. Her birth, therefore, was as noble as her person was beautiful: but my father knew that his family were then negociating a marriage for him, with one of the Roman house of Orsini; and, aware of this, he saw the desperation of

applying for their consent to his union with the daughter of Alviano. But his passion was not to be restrained; and hoping that this projected Roman marriage might end, as similar engagements had done, in mere speculation, he endeavoured to prevail on the object of his wishes to become his wife. In short he closed his eyes upon every thing which reason and duty opposed: and countenanced by her brother only, Laura followed the impulse of her heart, and gave her hand to my father at a private nuptials.

"Not very long afterwards, he was recalled to Florence, and obliged to quit her.

"My father was not blessed with that strength of character which enables a man to contend against difficulties, when the impulse of passion has ceased; and he did not venture to reveal his secret to my grandfather: so the treaty with the Orsini family proceeded. My mother,

meanwhile, continued in the neighbourhood of Venice, soothed by her husband's letters, but dreading the hour in which my birth must either cover her with shame, or oblige Piero to brave deserved anger, by avowing their union.

"I fear my father's had been but a boyish passion speedily cooled: but his nature was tender, and if it wanted the spur of ardour, it felt the force of a self-sought obligation. No sooner did he become assured that she was likely to make him a parent, than he hastened to Venice, confessed their marriage to her family, obtained their pardon and approval, and returned to Florence to make the same dreaded confession to my grandfather.

In the first poignancy of mortification, Lorenzo could not forbear displaying to his son, the dishonour with which his inconsiderate conduct must cover him. The contract which he had been just about to sign with the Orsini would now, instead of cementing his friendship with that lofty house, be remembered as an

insult; yet the marriage tie was sacred in the sight of the venerable man; and he declared himself incapable of seeking to break it, as he might have done in his parental character, by application to the court of Rome. He consented therefore to receive his daughter-in-law, not only with honour, but affection.

"Often have I heard my father relate the particulars of this scene, and that with even livelier sentiments of filial gratitude than he confesses he felt at the time — he was but eighteen then! and he had never known adversity; and his was a mind which calamity exalted. The world misjudged my poor father, Prince; his heart was good and kind, his judgment alone was faulty."

Rossano gave this pious partiality a smile of indulgent approbation, and Ippolita pursued her story.

"My father's joyful return to Venice was staid by the arrival of a courier, who brought the sad tidings of my mother's

death, in the moment of my birth. The agitated suspense of her mind, that preceded her husband's avowal to her family, and the grief which followed his departure on a more apprehensive mission, had produced premature suffering; and I was born, and my poor father widowed, in little more than seven months after his marriage.

"The path of duty was now clear: my grandfather's generous pardon of his son's unsanctioned conduct, imposed an obligation upon that son, to redeem the honour his family had pledged for him to the Orsini: and after the short space of a single month, with a heart bleeding inwardly, my father became the husband of Alfonsina."

Ippolita pressed her hand upon her heart as if to deaden the pain that ached there; she drew a deep breath once or twice, and then began again:—

"I remained at Venice with my mother's relations. The great Lorenzo's

death, my father's accession to all the power and wealth and honours which had been accumulating on our fortunate, I will say illustrious house, for three generations; — his loss of these — his expulsion from Florence — the proscription of all who bore his name and followed his fortunes; — these are events with which Europe has echoed.

"My father's second marriage had not been happy; and upon the loss of his dignities, his wife retired to her family in Rome, with her children Lorenzo and Clarice. Thus bereft of every domestic solace, it is no wonder that my poor parent was eager to draw towards him some being who might restore the memory of happier days: I was a sad remembrancer of such days; but still I *did* recall them; and having lost all my near maternal relations, excepting my mother's brother, my father did not think it wholly selfish to make me the companion of his fugitive life.

"I had been nursed by the foster-sister of my mother. This worthy person was the wife of a subaltern in the Venetian service. Her only child died just as she took me to her care; and never having another, I became as their own to these excellent people. I need not tell you that it is my foster-father's name I bear. Ah Prince! mine has been a trying destiny! — To have seen both the dear protectors, to whom I have addressed that sacred title, perish by untimely deaths!"

Ippolita endeavoured to disperse the tears which crowded into her eyes; they gathered anew, and for awhile prevented her proceeding. At length she resumed, though with less calmness than before. "Martello and his good Nanina agreed to share my father's wanderings for my sake; and they alternately accompanied us from Italy into France; from France to Germany; from Rome to Milan; from courts to camps — sometimes seeing us

received with reverence, sometimes repulsed with insult.

"My father's efforts to regain what he esteemed his rights in Florence, were now assisted, and now opposed by the very same Princes, just as it suited their temporary policy to play upon his passions and make his name the instrument of their aggrandizement. Sometimes he was encouraged by the voluntary services of independent commanders, and then again deserted by them, when the intrigues or the money of the Florentines were exerted to seduce their faith. One only, remained constantly true; my mother's brother, Bartolomeo Alviano. As the commander of Condottieri, whose reputation his prowess had raised to an equality with the ablest troops of the day, his arms were often engaged by other powers, but never did he abandon the interests of my father; and during the eleven years of his exile, my uncle's

zeal never abated. He is harsh to me, but he was kind and loyal to my father!

"Prince, our wandering life had many pains; but it had its pleasures also for my inexperienced and enquiring age: and its advantages I feel every moment of my existence. It showed me the hearts of men without disguise: for it was not worth their while to throw any veil over their motives for assisting or deserting a powerless exile: and thus I learnt all the greatness, the meanness, and the weakness of my species. Often has my young heart been agonized with the cowardice or ingratitude of those it relied on as our truest supporters: but never, never may I forget how many bright instances it has been cheered by, of disinterested, unexpected sacrifice!"

"Cherish that remembrance!" said Rossano, checking a sigh, "our own virtues lose firmness, when we cease to believe in those of others. As a cultivated taste makes us receive more vivid im-

pressions from the beauty and deformity of material objects, so experience, though it may shock us with proofs of astonishing wickedness, gives us many instances of invulnerable integrity; and heightens our value for that integrity, by making us acquainted with the difficulty with which it has been maintained. Imagination lends a false brilliancy to our affections:—it is *proof* that makes them part of our souls. In *my* opinion *one tried* friend is well gained by a whole life of foregone disappointment."

"I had two such in Martello and Nanina:" replied Ippolita, "and I had a third,—one whom no mortifications could disgust; no disappointments discourage; no disasters weary; one whose unequalled love nothing could extinguish.

"That friend too, is gone!—I am left alone—once I should have said, left desolate—but it is not so: for at this moment my long-chilled heart is glowing with admiration, affection, and gratitude.

I am thankful for these new sources of happiness; but I cannot forget!—O Prince there are events, which from the crowding in of others, during the lapse of a few years, come less and less frequently into our thoughts: but when they do return, believe me, it is with undiminished force."

"I know there are such!" said the Prince emphatically, fixing his eyes upon the ground. Ippolita sighed for him as well as for herself, and resumed:

"This friend I speak of, was Fabio Orsini, an orphan relation of my stepmother's, and brought up by my father; I was therefore habituated to consider him as a sort of kinsman.

"Enthusiastically attached to my father, devoted to the same liberal studies; determined to share his fate, wherever it might lead, and however terminate; he engrafted his destiny upon ours, with a constancy and cheerfulness which have no parallels.

"How precious he became to us! — his ardent aspiration after every intellectual acquirement, called up the languishing powers of my father's elegant and richly cultivated mind; his ever-vernal spirit of hope, flourishing in despite of many a withering disappointment, refreshed and invigorated my poor father's failing confidence; his unchanging affection, and cheerful sacrifices, revived our trust in human nature, and in our fortune. How often has he lighted our extinguished hopes anew, at the bright flame of his cheering looks! how often has his animating voice roused our buried courage, like the sound of a trumpet! In the midst of dangers, and difficulties, and miseries; at times when we scarcely knew where to lay our proscribed heads; when want menaced us; when follower after follower abandoned us; when every promise was retracted, and every succour withdrawn; nay when my father's cause seemed desperate even to himself, then

did our Fabio's holy confidence brighten with our darkening fortunes! invincible in hope, and thus conquering fate itself by the enthusiasm of a quenchless spirit, he led my father on, as if conducting him to a triumph.

"O Fabio, brother of my soul! dear play-fellow of my childhood! friend and cheerer of my tearful youth! how dearly wast thou beloved, how well didst thou deserve that love!

"Forgive me, Prince! I lose myself;" said Ippolita, interrupting her sad apostrophe, and recalling her eyes from their upward gaze, "the remembrance of Fabio is consecrated to me by a thousand tender and heart-rending recollections. You have perhaps never known the powerful bond of suffering: it is strong as death.—It bound us together with an affection which made us forget that we were not twin-born, the offspring of the same parents."

At this sentence, Prince Angelo fixed

an enquiring look of surprise upon Ippolita.

"I perceive your mistake," she observed, with a mournful smile; "Yet how could you fancy, that I would have spoken thus liberally of our attachment to each other, had it been of the sort you supposed? It was the tenderness of brother and sister. It never could have changed its character under any circumstances; and now I never can feel the same for any other."

"You cannot?" said Rossano, thoughtfully; "such a sisterly attachment as your's for Orsini, was the work of time and events acting in concert with congenial dispositions; thus, unless such circumstances could be combined again, you never can feel a similar affection. Could you have a second infancy and youth so spent, and so cheered by a second kindred spirit; could you again accumulate a similar treasure of remembered benefits and sympathies; believe me, you

would find that the mines of the human heart are inexhaustible; — time alone bounds their operation.

"It is no dishonour to any powerful sentiment, that we are capable of feeling it more than once; but I know that ardent youth is nobly apt to think otherwise. I can remember the period, when I thought the sublimest attribute of Deity was his invariableness; — the most humiliating of man's imperfections, his promptness to new impressions.

"But it is wisely ordered as it is. For what would become of us, if we were to brood with vain constancy, over the objects that have failed us, and were once our sum of bliss?"

"I shall not live my life over again;" said Ippolita, anxious to detach his mind from its present train of thoughts; "And I confess it is sweet to me to feel certain that Fabio's memory will never be rivalled in my heart. — But I wander from my subject.

"When the French army were proceeding to chastise the Castilians for their encroachments on the French share of your conquered, ill-used Naples, my father came to the court of the former in Romagna. He was then projecting a new attempt upon Florence, in which Cæsar Borgia offered his powerful aid; and success seemed certain, if my uncle Alviano could be brought to assist them. his troops were then in the pay of Castile, and acting in concert with those of Gonsalvo di Cordova. My father, confident of detaching his brother-in-law from that service, negociated with him by many secret means, and finally hoped, through his power, to procure either a promise of co-operation or of neutrality, from the great captain.

"I need not repeat to a Neapolitan the disastrous events of that period. The French army, with which we moved, sustained defeat upon defeat; but my father's private hopes suffered no dimi-

nution. He contrived to have a secret interview with my uncle, who gave him substantial assurances, that immediately on the expulsion of the French, Gonsalvo would embrace his cause, and join the friends of the Medici, in restoring them to their rights.

"When we saw you, Prince, his heart and mine, were warm with those sanguine hopes."

"Your looks were bright with them," observed Rossano.

"They were our brightest, and our last!" ejaculated Ippolita in a low, mournful voice, "after that came the fatal battle of the Garigliano: we fled from the disastrous field, and embarking in a small vessel, proceeded towards Gaeta. — Decayed and overloaded, the boat sunk at the very mouth of the river. There perished my father and the faithful Nanina, my more than mother; — there perished Fabio; and except Martello,

every unwearied follower of our wintry fortunes. — O memory! — memory!"

Ippolita's tearless eyes raised in silent appeal to Heaven, had something sublime in their intense expression. After a long pause, she suddenly pressed them down with her clasped hands, and an irrepressible groan burst from her labouring heart.

Prince Angelo was silent from excess of sympathy.

At length she rose; and turning on him a countenance like death, said in a hurried voice, "I cannot finish this melancholy history to day: will you give me your attention to-morrow?" —

"Where, and when you please," replied the Prince, rising also, "you have awakened my best feelings, and I am impatient to learn how I can serve you."

"To-morrow, then, in this place, two hours after sun-rise." — Ippolita spoke with haste and difficulty. The Prince

assented to the appointment; and thanking him only with a watery glance, she hurried away, before her suspended tears should begin their long deluge.

CHAPTER IX.

At the hour appointed on the following day, Ippolita found Prince Angelo waiting her in the grotto. — Rosalia's tender health made her incapable of early rising, and Valombrosa usually devoted that time of the morning to business.

Secure therefore from interruption, after the interchange of some friendly inquiries, she resumed the conversation of the day before.

" In the vessel, besides those who perished, was Guidobaldo Alviano, my uncle's son. Brave as his father, and with a person that has often been compared to the noblest statue in the Vatican, he never was seen without exciting admiration; he never was remembered

without a shudder of astonishment and fear. But he preserved me from the wreck of every thing most dear to me.— As our kinsman, he had often come from the Castilian camp to visit my father; and at last prompted by a wild fancy for me, he actually deserted his father's standard, to watch over my conduct to persons whom he falsely suspected of a wish to rival him in a regard he never possessed.

"In spite of every effort to prevent him, he had flung himself into the fatal boat in which we hoped to reach Gaeta; and being a skilful swimmer, he saved himself and me.

"His father's influence excused him to the Castilians, for this desertion of their cause. The indiscretion of youth, and the force of passion, were pleaded in his favour. The plea prevailed with the generalissimo, but not with me. I could not respect the man in whom love could triumph over honour and duty. It is true

neither he nor his father owed a native allegiance to Castile: but having once entered its service, they were surely bound by as solemn an obligation to fulfil that voluntary engagement, as if the accident of birth had made them its subjects. — I could not esteem, I could not therefore love Guidobaldo."

"And did you reason thus, at sixteen?" inquired Rossano with a smile, somewhat incredulous in its expression.

"Perhaps I did not define my reasons so exactly," replied Ippolita with modest firmness, "I rather felt, than demonstrated the insecurity of my cousin's principles. — But even at sixteen I was habituated to sift motives from actions, to trace the most plausible to sources which poisoned them completely. Indeed I had learned, from solicitude for my father, to distinguish between selfish and disinterested impulses. The depository of all his hopes and fears and projects, my intellect was strengthened by constant

use: for if I durst not always discuss those subjects with him, my anxious affection made me do it with myself, or Fabio; and thus I learnt to view circumstances and characters in every possible light, and to pass through life, I may say, carrying a torch into every bosom. Such a necessity 'robbed me of my youth!' — Alas, I think I never knew that thoughtless period! With all these pretensions to sagacity, I will confess that I might not have judged my cousin so sanely, had his manners captivated me. They did not: and I was shocked at the indelicacy with which he urged the service he had rendered me, and the dishonour he had incurred, as rights over my heart. I was grateful to him for the preservation of my life, worthless as that life then was to me; but I would not allow him any claim on my gratitude for having indulged his own jealous passion at the expence of his honour. In short, Prince, I am not one of those yielding

spirits who are to be braved out of their happiness by despotic selfishness. I did not love Guidobaldo; I could never have loved him; for with the look of a hero, and the form of a god, his mind is as rude as his temper is violent. But had he not persecuted and upbraided me, I am certain that I could not have witnessed his sufferings, and reflected upon my obligations to his father, without endeavouring to give up my own happiness for his peace."

As Ippolita paused, Prince Angelo fixed his eyes earnestly upon her, with a mind so full of the sad and serious thoughts her discourse created, that he was unconscious of the gaze; a slight appearance of confusion in her face recalled him to perception.

"Pardon me!" he said, "allow me a little amazement. — I am not familiarized with such firm sentiments from the lips of a woman. I began my career of life with false notions of your sex; I looked to

find only innocence and pliability in the best and loveliest, and I should have demanded something nobler. I have had my punishment and my instruction!"

There was a stern feeling of past misery in the expression of Rossano's countenance, as he concluded, which remained long after he spoke: Ippolita comprehending the nature of his reflections, hastened to divert his attention from his own private history to her's, and she resumed her narrative.

"After the loss of my dear father, and that respectable woman, whose maternal care had watched over me, through all the varieties of our wandering life, a camp could not be my home; and eager to escape from the importunities of my cousin, and the rough reproaches of my uncle, I fled to Rome, and threw myself on the protection of my step-mother.

"There, I drank deep of a new species of misery; the misery of perpetual domestic persecution. Then it was, that I

learnt to believe no destiny wretched, while sweetened by affection. I was nothing to any one in that cheerless house; worse than nothing; for they considered me as an usurper of their rights.

"My father had bequeathed to me all he had left to bestow, a claim upon the Court of Vienna for a very large sum of money advanced by him in his golden-days to the Emperor. My step-mother and her children were early secured in honourable independence, by my father's surrender to them, of all the lands he possessed out of Tuscany; and except this hope of a fortune, he had left me destitute. Yet they would have had me resign that hope to them; and consent to live their pensioner for life.

"Perhaps, you think it would have been better had I done so; certainly I would not have contested my right, but have withdrawn at once from the toils and strife of the world, by embracing

a religious profession, had not duty withheld me.

"So many persons, by espousing my father's cause, and afterwards sharing his mournful fate, had left families behind, thus reduced to poverty; to so many also was he indebted for pecuniary assistance, which now those persons needed themselves; that it became an obligation on me, not to yield up their rights with my own. I was therefore stedfast in asserting my claims.

"This determination was the fuel of all our domestic heart-burnings; my sister mocked that filial grief, which could, as she said, couple itself so conveniently with worldly interests. My proud brother affected to treat me as an illegitimate child, from the circumstance of my father's non-age at the time of his clandestine marriage; and my step-mother, continually charged me with having insidiously robbed her of the affections

she had first thrown from her, — my poor father's.

"This was the most insupportable period of my life, Prince Angelo; for it was that in which I suffered the most positive injustice, and felt the most resentment. Nay, it alarmed me at myself; and I often doubted, whether it were not I that was the hateful one, when a whole family accused me of being a fire-brand.

"How often was I not maddened into the momentary resolution of abandoning all, and burying myself in a convent. My cousin, Guidobaldo too, persecuted me with his passionate suit; and his father refused to substantiate my claim on Austria, unless I would lend a favourable ear to this favourite son.

"My dearest paternal uncle, Giuliano, was far away, endeavouring to obtain the assistance of the King of Castile, in the old, fruitless struggle for the restoration, at least, of his private pa-

trimony. Who was to urge my suit in Germany? So all that I reaped then from my father's legacy, was vexation of spirit."

"You do not mention your other uncle, the Cardinal di Medici," observed Prince Angelo, "did not he take an interest in you?"

"Alas!" replied Ippolita, "he was absorbed in grief for the early death of Galleoto della Rovere, in whose fraternal friendship his life had been almost bound up. For many months, all his own concerns in this world became as nothing to him; how then was I to press mine? How could I even wish to disturb such sacred sorrow? and he too, had his bitter mortifications, when his spirit recovered the painful power of feeling their stings. He held a distinguished dignity; he had been educated in profusion; and he was poor! — I would not double the pangs that fettering poverty often gave his bountiful heart, so I kept my griefs to myself.

" After twelve months domestic martyrdom, for such it was, I was released from the humour and ostentatious protection of my step-mother, by her removal to Florence with Clarice, whom a noble Florentine had been rash enough to marry. It was a bold step, and the event proved, that my step-mother had reckoned too confidently upon the preponderancy of our party in that city, and the awe of her great family. She and her children were banished anew, together with Strozzi, Clarice's husband.

" On Clarice's marriage, my uncle Giuliano hastened to take me under his guardianship; he had found an asylum at the court of the Duke of Ferrara, and it was there my bruised spirit first rose again.

" I must not attempt describing my uncle Giuliano; my overflowing heart would carry me too far. Suffice it, that all the gentler virtues are summed up in him. Of a delicate constitution, in-

different to wealth, unambitious, fond of study, he was glad to harbour awhile from the storms of vexatious enterprises; and at the court of Ferrara, he could give me the advantage I had long needed, of the first female examples of the age.

"The Duchess, as well as the Duke, surrounded herself by talent and accomplishments; in such society, I began once more to feel the long forgotten sensation of pleasure; and in the tenderness and goodness of my uncle, I found happiness again.

"You wonder to hear me talk of happiness; but the degrading, embittering sort of wretchedness which I had endured in my step-mother's house, taught me, that there are incalculable degrees of misery; and that we should proportion our sensibility to each, according to the measure of its weight.

"In short, however awful or grievous may be the judgments of God, dis-

played in sudden reverses of fortune, or in the death of friends, they are not to be compared with the anguish which comes direct from the injustice and the humours of our fellow-creatures. Thus impressed, I certainly felt far less than formerly, the evil, and more animatedly the good, of our chequered lot; for come what might, I had still a heart to rest on, fond as my father's and Fabio's; and if not as elastic as the latter, better suited to pillow a spirit tired with the vain pursuit of phantoms.

"Thus glided the years 1505, 6, and 7. During this period we moved to the court of the Duke d'Urbino.

"Meanwhile, Guidobaldo Alviano, harassed me with his painful constancy. Will you think me ungrateful, if I term it his obstinate determination to conquer all opposition to his will? His father, whose whole life had unhappily been spent in pampering the selfish desires of this son, was chafed at my refusal and

he resolutely refused taking any part in my uncle Giuliano's endeavours to obtain for me the payment of the German debt.

"As Alviano held in his possession the single letter in which my grandfather Lorenzo had formally acknowledged my mother as his daughter; and as my maternal uncle was besides one of the only two persons then living who could swear to her marriage, his refusal to come forward in my behalf was nearly fatal to my cause.

"My brother Lorenzo was thus allowed full power to traverse my suit, by representing his own right to the legacy, on the ground of my illegitimacy. Yet for all this, my kind uncle slackened none of his military efforts in the service of our family cause. The chronicles of those times will bear testimony to his zeal, his valour, and his losses on our account.

"Of course you may suppose, that to retain the assistance of such a powerful

auxiliary, my brother Lorenzo affected to espouse the interest of Guidobaldo's passion, and thus added a second cause of quarrel with me.

"His intrigues to prevent the settlement of my demand on Germany were but too well seconded by the Emperor Maximilian's notorious profuseness, and consequent want of money; who, glad of a pretext for withholding so large a sum, necessary to his wasteful habits, plausibly refused paying it, till one of the two disputing parties should establish their right by indisputable documents.

"Thus all the expences which my uncle Giuliano incurred, in the payment of agents, advocates, journeys, &c. were thrown away; and at a time when he could raise money by only the extremest personal or mental sacrifices; at a time, too, when our feelings were rent perpetually by the distress or importunities of those who had devoted their families to ruin by fidelity to my poor father.

"Torn by contending passions, sometimes on the point of throwing myself into a convent, to end this domestic broil; sometimes yielding to the conviction that it would be basely selfish in me thus to abandon my only chance for recompensing past services; I was often on the point of giving my revolting hand to Guidobaldo: but like a guardian angel still did my dear uncle Giuliano interpose his mild reasonings between me and so frantic an alternative.

"At this critical juncture the confederate war against the Venetians, which has this year raged so fiercely, was just beginning to flame out. My uncle Alviano was to command the army of Venice; and the Emperor Maximilian, it was said, would come in person to oppose him.

"I was now of an age to feel that revolting as it may be for a woman to enter the lists with men in a legal contest, yet that she must do so, and make the sa-

crifice, the great sacrifice! of private delicacies, when her public duties command it.

"Fortified by the images of numberless, suffering, expecting dependants,—alas, it was like a mother regarding so many famishing children!—and animated by the recollection of the devotedness which this cold coin was feebly to repay, I proposed seeking the Emperor, and personally demanding justice. Never would such an opportunity as the present, perhaps, offer itself again. I could, without much expence or danger, reach the imperial presence; and as I knew Maximilian was already inflamed with wrath at the successes of the Venetian troops under Alviano, I might possibly find him inclined to do me justice, solely to revenge himself upon that commander. My other dear uncle sanctioned the bold effort; and, quitting Urbino, we set out on our journey.

"My hope of success depended prin-

cipally upon the testimony of Martello, who was the second witness of my father's and mother's marriage, and who had happily preserved, and has since transferred to me, a paper written by my grandfather Lorenzo, containing some orders respecting the honourable conduct he wished given to his daughter-in-law, in her removal from Venice to Florence. This paper, acknowledging her in that character, combined with Martello's other testimony, must, we thought, establish my legitimacy to any mind open to conviction.

"Martello was at this time at the head of that remnant of banished Florentines who yet looked to the restoration of our exiled family as the goal of their miseries. They were acting with the Pisans, in obedience to my brother Lorenzo, whose restless ambition never ceased urging his followers into whatever measures might distress the people of Florence, and therefore make them sus-

pect Sodorini, the present head of that republic, of incapacity.

"To procure the paper then in Martello's custody, my uncle Giuliano and I turned aside on our road, and met the old soldier at the monastery of Spirito Santo in Argentina.

"You know the catastrophe of that inauspicious meeting. The town was surprised, Martello fell, and my uncle was obliged to fly.

"But should your uncle have flown?" asked Rossano, the pitying tone in which he spoke, moderating the severity of the question.

"O surely, surely!" cried Ippolita. "The town, you know, was taken by assault. The fury of the conquerors was at first terrible. Had he been recognised, (and who of Florence would not have known him?) he would either have been butchered on the spot, or taken to Florence, there to end his honoured life, as

Neri and Vitelli had done before,—by violence!

"He was outlawed, you know; a price was set upon the heads of all the brothers; and Florence, that scene of horrors to our fated race,—that place where even God's own altar was reddened with the innocent blood of a former Giuliano,—Florence would have avenged upon his peaceful head, all the luckless enterprises of my father, all the turbulent animosity of my brother.

"Oh, if you could guess with what difficulty I made such arguments triumph! If you could have seen my tears, my distraction; have heard my wild threats of throwing myself at once upon the swords of the assailants, rather than, living, to witness his murder!

"Even the prior urged the destruction in which we must all be involved, if he should be found amongst us. He bade him remember that, unconnected with him, and not known as a Medici,

my sex, and the sanctuary of the house, would guarantee my safety. Martello offered to proclaim himself my father, and remain either to protect me, or share my captivity. Time pressed; the enemy were already thundering at the gates of the monastery. I know not well what I said, what I did. I saw nothing but the dreadful vision of my dear uncle butchered in my very arms; and rushing from the cell, where the prior was hastily throwing a monk's habit over the armour of Giuliano. — I cannot remember what followed, till I first saw the Marquis Valombrosa. O that moment! that countenance like heaven! I felt that no deed of horror could be wrought before such merciful eyes!"

Ippolita stopt from excess of emotion. As Rossano delicately withdrew his eyes from her face, she caught their movement, and a conviction of the ideas which caused it, suffused her with blushes.

"Your uncle's situation was indeed,

a cruel one:" he said at last, "yes! it was his duty to fly. Did he escape unseen?"

"He did!" replied Ippolita, not daring to look up again, after her late transport. "One of the lay-brothers safely conducted him by a remote egress, through some obscure parts of the town, to the hermitage of Santa Anna. Thence he found his solitary way to Urbino.

"It was long after my removal here, that I had the comfort of knowing this latter part of his route; and of receiving his felicitations on my safety. The convulsed state of Italy, the factions which rent all the petty states where he had friends, and the honourable reputation of my young protector, led my uncle to wish I would remain so sheltered, while he singly sought the Emperor, and tried the effect of his own presence, and the important document from my grandfather left by Martello. He was also actuated by another consideration: he

believed that I judged with less passion than most of my family; and that by a residence at Florence, where I had never been before, and therefore could not be known; I might see clearly, and report faithfully the strength of our party. Since my residence here, many important events have occurred. My uncle Alviano is a prisoner in France, he was taken in the desperate battle of the Ghiaradadda, where he and Guidobaldo performed prodigies of useless valour. We do not yet know whether Guidobaldo fell, or is captive also.

"Thus I breathe from one persecution: but my brother has succeeded in obtaining part of the debt from the Emperor, by way of recompence for secret services done him with the Pope, by the powerful Orsini family; and my uncle Giuliano, returning from his vain journey to Vienna, has been arrested at Bologna on suspicion of having stolen

into that city as an agent of the Bentivoglio.

"I enter not into the question of the Pope's right to take by force of arms that lordship from the Bentivoglio; but I know their city, and those princes afforded us a shelter when no other dared open her gates to exiles; and I do not doubt, therefore, that some proofs of my uncle's grateful correspondence with them, will be found among his papers, and that perhaps, the stern Pontiff may consider such a circumstance treason against the triple crown!

"It is my earnest wish to go to my uncle; to join our destinies, indeed, together. But alone, and without means — embarrassed by my sex, I pause upon the thought, lest by rash exposure of myself among those numberless martial bands which are now spread over all the contested principalities, I may increase my dear uncle's difficulties, instead of relieving them.

"There was a time, Prince, when I should have obeyed the first impulse of my feelings, without reflecting on their possible consequences; or had I thought of danger to myself, should have deemed it selfish to have desisted therefore from the attempt. Events have now taught me the higher obligation of stifling our most passionate wish of self-sacrifice, when by making it we only transfer the load of anxiety from ourselves, to the object we struggle for.

"I am troubled by the fear of either estimating these difficulties too much, or too little; and I fear too, for my dear uncle's life, — his fading health — a dungeon, perhaps!"

Ippolita stopt, choaked with tears; while Rossano kindly taking her hand, said with the frank tone of one who would be astonished were he denied, "I am happily an unimportant person, and may go whither I will, unsuspected. I will see your uncle if possible; learn the

reality of his situation, and receive his instructions respecting you. Why should you risk danger, when you have such a harbour here? You do not wish to leave such friends as Valombrosa and his sister?"

As he fixed his searching eye for a moment upon her, Ippolita lost her usual look of self-possession — with kindling and successive blushes, she hesitatingly answered; "I do wish it, Prince — but do not think me ungrateful: I am only *too* grateful." She faltered, then added, "and I sometimes fear, that my desolate situation interests more than it ought — more than is well for his peace —" A deepening crimson here dyed her clear complexion, and her failing voice was no longer audible.

The Prince continued to detain her hand in his, but sunk into thought. At length looking up with the animation of cordial interest, he said, "I had imagined something like this. Valom-

brosa's heart is as transparent as that cheek; so he could not, if he would, conceal his feelings. I will not ask to see more of your's, than you choose to show a man, once too well acquainted with the master passion, — but now," — the Prince broke off for a moment, dropping her hand; then resumed; "and what is it I must do for you?"

"Dictate my future conduct," replied Ippolita, fixing her eyes upon him with an expression of perfect reliance on his judgment.

"I would you were any thing but a Medici!" exclaimed the Prince with unusual fervor.

Ippolita understood the kindly reason for that wish, and softly sighing, said, "I well know what destiny is coupled with that proscribed name: a cloister for me — lives of dependence, or deaths of glory for my kinsmen! — O never may I foster the cruel wish of seeing the best

and noblest of mankind, involved with fates so desperate!"

"Not desperate!" interrupted Rossano, "Your family has still a powerful, nay, a growing party in this state. Even those who bore the hardest upon the mistakes of Piero, his then inexperienced son, revert to the days of the venerable Lorenzo, with pride and regret. I frequently hear the present head of the republic, accused of leaning basely to the French interest; and certainly, even shallow politicians must see the weakness of a system which leads him to purchase the integrity of the Florentine possessions, by guaranteeing the conquests of France in other parts of Italy — 'tis a mischievous system! — it was but the other day, that I heard it said in a mixed assembly, that were the Medici restored to their patrimony and influence, with them would return that sound policy of Lorenzo; *the expulsion of every foreign power.*"

"Such a patriotic policy is the spring of my uncle Giuliano's ambition;" observed Ippolita, "if to so holy a feeling I may give so profaned a name!— Should he ever return to his native place, his bitterest enemies will find that he comes to pardon them, and to place Florence on her once proud throne of arts and arms!—but that hour Providence does not destine for us!—Though Soderini lessens in popularity, all the posts of trust are in the hands of his friends. He is an upright man, though perhaps a misjudging one: and knowing him to be honest, the people may censure his government, but they will go on obeying it. Or even should they make a struggle, he will seek support from France, and find it: so will that power repay his present services. I have no hopes! and it is well: if I had, they might tempt me to forget that the Marquis Valombrosa's prosperity"—

"You are right," rejoined the Prince,

observing her hesitate, — " the question now is, what is the best for you to do with reference to Valombrosa. But let us reflect a little."

In a few moments he addressed her again. After weighing the probable consequences of her rash departure for Bologna uncalled for by her uncle, against the possible evils which might result to Valombrosa from her protracted stay in Tuscany, he still concluded in favour of her remaining until Giuliano could make dispositions for her removal.

" Upon characters like Valombrosa's," he said, " mere absence will not have any effect: so you need not lament the necessity which detains you near him. All you can do, is to endeavour at manifesting nothing beyond grateful esteem. I think the conviction that it is next to impossible for you to be his, (Rossano spoke with compassionate reluctance) would convince him that he must at least try to conquer his affection. Your duty

would then be done; and indeed I consider this so pressing a one, that I shall hope to convince your uncle of the obligation you are under to reveal your name, and then to seek some other asylum."

Rossano then proceeded to say that it was his intention to make the journey to Bologna immediately: that instructed by her how to find out Giuliano's friends in that city, he would either see him through their means, or learn some mode of communicating with him; and after obtaining from him directions for the conduct of Ippolita, would return and assist her in fulfilling those directions, to the utmost of his power.

Ippolita could have said much, had she trusted herself to speak; but it was only her momentarily-raised and swimming eye, which spoke to him of gratitude.

After some questions connected with their principal subject, Prince Angelo inquired more particularly into the past

proceedings of her suit with the Emperor. He then suggested, that as the Emperor's justice had been warped by consideration for the Orsini family, so powerful with the Chief Pontiff, he might now be induced to act rightly, through resentment against the Pontiff himself.

"I have still some political connections," observed Rossano, "and I know that his Holiness, alarmed at the victory of the Ghiaradadda, already repents having lent his weight to the confederacy against Venice, and means to withdraw his troops from the assistance of the ambitious Maximilian. At so critical a juncture, such a disappointment, must inflame the Emperor beyond endurance; and doubtless he will then eagerly seize any opportunity of marking his resentment against the Court of Rome, by disobliging its highest house, that of Orsini.

"Then will be the time to press your suit. See what despicable engines we are forced to use, though to compass our

purest ends! — the passions of men, when theory would dream of their principles!" Rossano smiled and shrugged up his shoulders, as if with that careless scorn which is as brief and unimportant as summer lightning; but there was more serious meaning in his eyes: and Ippolita read there, the deep sadness of one who reflects too much, and feels too deeply. — Her own concerns were then forgotten.

"I see you are a nice observer of human nature:" she said gently, "may not that habit be carried too far for peace and social enjoyment? I have sometimes thought that a very quick perception of character, is as fatal an endowment as that strange power of foreseeing future calamities, which we read of as peculiar to some northern countries."

Rossano looked up at her for a moment, then looked down again, and was silent. At last, unconscious how long a time had elapsed since her remark, he

answered, "I own the truth of your observation, Signora: I *have* carried this habit to an excess which has disenchanted life. But —" he paused again — "my heaviest misfortune arose from total ignorance of human nature — from the lying dreams of an imagination which brought its images from heaven to earth; which fancied an angel — where," the Prince broke off, and Ippolita seeing his brow moistened with large drops started by strong emotion, moved towards the mouth of the grotto.

Rossano hastily followed, and grasping her arm with unconscious force, held her there an instant; then releasing her, said with painful rapidity,

"You have a right to know something more of the man who presumes to be your friend, than what he chooses to let the world see. — I appear, I hope I *am* now, a reasonable man, of moderate feelings; I was once the victim of imagination and inordinate sensibility. — I

am now, a voluntary solitary, hanging loose from society, with no ostensible objects in life, but peace and intellectual improvement: I was formerly the prey of ambition. — Perhaps I am not yet quite secure from that mighty passion; but if I have not destroyed the demon, I have chained him. — I am now unloved, unloving; dead to all that beauty, sweetness, tenderness, might tempt me with; — and once I loved! Oh heaven and earth, how loved!"

Rossano's altered voice, thrilled Ippolita with something like terror; his agitation indeed was fearful; for his whole body shook, his eyes fluctuated, and his pale features assumed a ghastly hue.

Ippolita's tender accents enabled him to shake off this seizure: he covered his face, and stood some time subduing his weakness. At length removing his hands, he said, in an inward voice, "It is not often that I escape thus, from my better self; but I believe you must know enough

of my history, to pardon me an occasional paroxysm like this.—With the character I describe, I loved and married her who afterwards left me.—Trust not to the beauty and the look of an angel—She possessed them; take not that playful sportiveness which carries the charm of childhood into maturity, for the evidence of a spotless heart—*She* possessed it! —Depend not on simple innocence for the preservation of a husband's honour —*She* was innocence itself when I led her from the altar to my joyous home!

"Dorina was new to the world and all its vanities, and I was charmed to possess a creature, whose mind like a fair sheet of paper, might be traced with what characters I chose.—Fool, not to guess that the mind which has remained for eighteen years a blank page, will ever take durable impressions from the hand of instruction? it was cunning perhaps to earn a right for asking frivolous pleasures—or mere awe of a husband; but

she affected an interest in my studies, when, in truth, they were only becoming more irksome to her. She knew not how to estimate the love which sought to improve what it loved. — Alas! she was only capable of answering to that ignoble sort, which administers to the weaknesses of its object, and flatters while it despises. In short her beauty charmed a man level to her tastes; his stronger character, I suppose, gave the impulse to her feebler one; and while I was mourning over the grave of our only child, — she left me! — Do you ask how I survived this shock? (Rossano spoke the next sentences with a ghastly smile,) it was light, it was an atom to what crushed me afterwards. I believed that she had left me, when her heart first changed; accident, however, threw a letter in my way: a mislaid letter from her seducer of two years date, and that proved, — let me not think of it! — All was chaos, — and the child on which I

had doated; the child for whom my heart was weeping blood, — was — agony to remember! —"

Again Rossano stopt; but not again with wild violence: his eyes were half-closed; his features frightfully still; and Ippolita's ear but just caught the thrilling of a low shiver, which ran through his exhausted frame. One convulsive sigh, like that of a passing soul, followed this dismal shudder.

Ippolita rivetted her eyes on him, with her whole pitying heart speaking through them.

How potent is the attraction of sorrow! — not all the sympathy with which Prince Angelo had listened to her distresses, nor all his promises of friendly aid, had given her such confidence in his kindness, as she felt now. She drew nigh to him.

"Such a heart as your's, my Prince," she said, soothingly, "must not be lost to domestic bliss. Surely after the lapse

of six years, you ought not to brood over the remembrance of one so culpable?"

"Ah, do you not understand me yet?" asked the Prince convulsively, "I now regret, not the object, but the sentiment! that sentiment which is the well-spring of all life's sweet charities. — Her perfidy, her unfeelingness under such lovely seeming, have poisoned it at its source; and henceforth any sympathy I may cherish, must be tainted with suspicion. Not all the waters of Lethe, can wash away the hateful mixture."

"Time and trial will convince you otherwise," replied Ippolita. "Hitherto you have avoided opportunities of knowing your fellow-creatures better; now you are happily drawn from your solitude, into a house, where surely every prejudice must vanish?"

"Perhaps they ought," replied Rossano, with a long-drawn sigh, yet sometimes I oppose myself to the charm which is stealing over my settled resolution."

"What resolution?"

Ippolita's question troubled the Prince; he turned away his face. "My resolution never to regard man or woman again, with such abandonment of soul, as to leave any part of my peace at the mercy of another's conduct."

"Wretched as I have been," said Ippolita, kindly, "I would not learn that lesson from you; this is not the creed you taught me so lately." The Prince asked her, with a bewildered air, what she alluded to! she repeated his words. "Our own virtues lose their best support, when we cease to believe in those of others."

"You are right," said Rossano. "I judge sanely, when I speculate on life, without reference to myself—madly, when my own feelings are interested;—such is human weakness: at least such is mine. So now you have given me in this one remark, a volume to reflect upon, we will part; when we meet next,

in the society of Valombrosa and his sister, I shall be the calm philosopher again!" the Prince smiled with melancholy disdain of himself; and Ippolita commending him to Heaven, and happier thoughts, bade him a temporary farewell.

CHAPTER X.

The following day Prince Angelo announced his intended journey to Bologna; simply stating it, as a matter of unexpected business, and engaging himself to return to *Il bel Deserto.*

He went, followed by the avowed regrets of Valombrosa and his sister; and the secret object of Ippolita's gratitude.

Thus left without her newly-appointed monitor, Ippolita trembled for the fate of his advice respecting Valombrosa; but happily the interests of others, and the duties and business of his own extensive estates, called him frequently away.

But when he did return to his dearest home, what beautiful abandonment of his soul to the simplest pleasures, the

gentlest affections was visible in his looks and manner! how fondly did he enter into all the lesser interests of Rosalia's limited sphere of action! how tenderly contrive for her, a perpetual variety of agreeable emotions, to supply the place of sight!

He had always wished to heighten his sister's recreations, by giving her the gratifying consciousness of being useful; and for this purpose, had selected a few orphan children to receive their education under her superintendance, and afterwards to be portioned by his bounty.

It was Rosalia's office to hear these interesting orphans repeat the religious lessons taught them by her confessor, and to instruct them verbally herself, in such humbler parts of knowledge, as was suited to their moderate destinations. At first her gentlewoman, but at length Ippolita, taught them the elegant varieties of female works.

A pretty rotunda, at the distance of an

agreeable walk from the house, was given up solely to the accommodation of Rosalia's pupils; and there Valombrosa would often follow his sister, and with a playful manner, but serious intention, assist her in her benevolent tasks.

He had a deep and lively sense of religion: and Ippolita more than once caught the tear of emotion in his eye, when one of the innocent little creatures knelt before him, repeating her vesper prayer. The kneeling child; the graciously-smiling benefactor; —manly virtue, and infantine innocence, thus grouped together, formed such a sacred picture, and conjured up so many touching ideas of what that gracious benefactor would be in every tender relation of life, that she who loved him was not likely to escape its dangerous charm.

Ippolita indeed, was hourly alarmed to find herself less capable than ever, of resisting the influence of his endearing character. It surrounded her everywhere.

She saw it in the interesting expressions of a face which was indeed the soul's mirror; she heard it in the penetrating sweetness of his voice; she felt it in those repeated acts of kindness, and graciousness and goodness, which he was habitually and carelessly performing.

And if she could not dull her senses to the impression of his noble character, still less could she close them against the subtle power of that *nameless something* in the conduct of another, which tells the *one beloved*, more audibly than words, that she is the object of every thought.

Sometimes she would detect herself in reveries of possible happiness. The restoration of her family, and the proud joy of giving to Valombrosa that hand which princes might then contest, would float before her fancy; while her heart exhaling itself in unconscious sighs, would thus betray its tenderness to him whose ear drank but too eagerly, even her gentlest breathing.

Terrified at this growing weakness, Ippolita made stronger efforts to shake it off; and had Prince Angelo been nigh to watch her conduct through each trying day, he must have owned that she was heroically faithful to her purpose.

The Prince was however mistaken in the present effect of that guarded conduct which he advised; for Valombrosa's constitutional tendency to happiness, made him satisfied with much less than Rossano had calculated.

One hastily-averted glance from Ippolita; a blush, a sigh, surprised from her, were enough to outweigh foregone days of more tempered actions. He could fancy a little romance of honour and gratitude, and pride, grounded on his rank, and her present changed situation, (for changed Valombrosa was determined to believe it, and to think her of noble birth) and could he have felt quite satisfied with her continued mystery to a friend like Rosalia, he would at once

have ended his doubts by confessing the sentiment she inspired.

Rosalia too assisted in misleading him; for she was not long in discovering the secret which he wanted the courage to disclose.

The peculiarity of her situation, acting upon a character originally unworldly, had strongly tinctured her mind with a species of virtuous romance, pardonable in youth and inexperience; she therefore loved Ippolita so enthusiastically, that she was ready to resign in her favour, all those visionary expectations for a favourite brother, which it is natural for sisters to indulge. What sought she but Orlando's happiness? and if that could now be secured by his union with the comparatively humble Ippolita, ought she not to promote it? Thus reasoned wildly-generous Seventeen.

Very doubtful of the nature of Ippolita's feelings but quite certain of his, yet ever saying to herself that two such be-

ings were expressly formed for each other; whenever he hazarded a covert question, the drift of which she had tact to discover, her answers were rather molded to the fashion of his wishes, than after the fashion of her own convictions.

No fraud is oftener practised than this; none with tenderer or more laudable intentions; but few more pregnant with mischief.

Valombrosa thus saw Ippolita's actions drest in the colours of his sister's self-deluded imagination, and he surrendered himself up to hopes, which were almost happiness.

At the expiration of a fortnight, a courier arrived from Prince Angelo Rossano; he brought a packet to Valombrosa, enclosing a letter to himself, and one for the Signora Martello.

Valombrosa repeated the address, without comment.

"His Excellency had the goodness to promise me information of some friends

at Bologna," said Ippolita, holding the unopened letter with a trembling hand. "I hope this brings it me."

She looked down, heart-struck with the apparent ingratitude of her conduct, in thus evidently confiding to Prince Angelo, the secret of her connections, which she withheld from these longer-proved friends.

In spite of himself, Valombrosa fixed his eyes upon her, with a steadfast look of surprise and displeasure, and suspicion. Ippolita met the withering look; a convulsive gasp burst from her cruelly oppressed heart. She would have said something to deprecate that look, and confess the ties which bound her to hateful concealment, but the dread of thus teaching Valombrosa the agonising value of his good opinion; the dread of purchasing her own satisfaction, by his present hope, and future disappointment, checked the just impulse, and she erred, as she sometimes did, from an excess of self-sacrifice.

"The news from absent friends, are best studied without witnesses." coldly observed Valombrosa, rising.

"Then I should withdraw," said Ippolita, forcing an appearance of cheerfulness. She left the room as she spoke, and the moment afterwards heard his voice in the vestibule, ordering his horses and servants to attend him to Florence.

Ippolita hurried to her chamber in a tumult of such feelings as she had never known before; the letter of Prince Angelo was in her hand unopened: even that anxiety for her beloved uncle, was suspended, which had throbbed in her heart for so long a time. She saw no other image than Valombrosa justly indignant at her cold concealments, or racked with jealousy of another.

Ippolita had a true woman's heart, disciplined as it was, by more than woman's ordinary lot: for once that heart gave up the struggle and abandoned itself to a passion of regret.

Suddenly struck with the remembrance that this letter might contain the permission for which she languished, of confessing herself to Rosalia and her brother. She broke the seal, and hurried over its contents.

Rossano had not compassed an interview with Giuliano di Medici; but one of the Prince's relations, a distinguished member of the sacred college, undertook to investigate the affair, and from the proofs he obtained of the illustrious prisoner's innocence, he expected to finally effect his liberation.

Rossano ended by assuring Ippolita that her kinsman so far from being confined in a dreary prison, was lodged apart in the ducal palace, with no other signs of captivity than personal confinement, and being restricted from any communication with friends.

Rossano hoped however to prevail yet farther with his powerful relation, and through his means obtain a secret meet-

ing with Giuliano, that should enable him to return into Tuscany, with permission for Ippolita to act freely according to circumstances and her own judgment.

In this narrative, though there was something to regret, there was much to be grateful for; and Ippolita yielded joyfully to such a delightful sentiment. She cast herself on her knees, dissolving into tears of a very different character from those she had just shed.

She then rose from her humble posture, calmed, and revived. But the glow of weeping still remained in her heavy eyelids, when she prepared to rejoin Rosalia. What mattered those swollen eyes, since Rosalia could not observe them, and Valombrosa was by this time, of course, on his perturbed way to Florence?

On entering the apartment where she had left her friends, she started at seeing Valombrosa: he was sitting in a desponding attitude under a porch of treillage, which united his sister's cabinet

with a marble terrace that roofed the colonnade below.

The sun was breaking out triumphant over a storm: the scattered but heavy clouds were sunk to a lower region; leaving the upper woods, (which were wet with rain, and tossed by rushing blasts,) to flash their green light upon the eye, with almost blinding brightness.

Rosalia stood out upon the terrace, "half in a blush of clustering roses lost," for the porch was covered with them; her hand rested upon her lute. "I will sing to you Orlando," were the words she was addressing to him: at Ippolita's step, she turned round, "Ah, you are returned!" she exclaimed, "come and help me to enliven this wayward brother of mine! I would not let him ride out in the thunderstorm, and he has been so refractory! but come, play him my favourite air: melancholy's foulest fiend cannot resist that."

"You are right my Rosalia," said her brother, rising from his dejected posture, with a look of generous shame. "It is a devil that you ask your friend to conjure away: — the fiend of ill-humour, and his name is legion."

He spoke with an assumed air of levity; for Valombrosa felt that there is sometimes an ostentation of repentance, nearly as censurable as impenitence.

"You shall have a wreath of amaranth for this;" rejoined Rosalia, tenderly imitating his attempt at playfulness, "I will gather the flowers, and Ippolita shall make the garland."

"It is certainly at the Signora's hands that I should receive the symbol of a much harder conquest!" said Valombrosa, in a low hurried voice, meant only for the ear of her to whom he directed a glance of penetrating meaning.

Rosalia meanwhile was cautiously advancing out upon the terrace, approaching a circle of flowering shrubs, which

generosity, that the young Rosalia began to tremble for the peace of him, dearest to her.

When Ippolita hastily ran over an abstract of the history she had recently related to Prince Angelo, and distinctly enumerated the solemn acts by which the republic had made it treason for any of its citizens, *knowingly*, to harbour or assist one of the Medicii; when she described her own horror at the bare idea of requiting her benefactor's goodness, by drawing ruin and infamy upon him and his; when she spoke of her resolution of immediately throwing herself into the first convent beyond the territories of Florence, then Rosalia's terror and grief burst out in an agony of impetuous tears. She clasped her friend repeatedly against her breast, adding to her other wild apostrophes, "alas! my poor Orlando!"

Ippolita's soul shook at that name so pronounced: but she durst not reply to

all which Rosalia's piercing tones implied. She remained silent: pale as monumental marble, as cold, and at length nearly as unconscious.

She was roused from her torpor, by Valombrosa's voice within the house, but at a distance: its buoyant sound so expressive of the joy of being at home again made her shudder; she rose, and hastily pronouncing his name, was hurrying away, when recollecting herself, she paused to add a request that Rosalia would impart to him what had just passed, and pardon her absence till they should meet at the hour of supper.

While she was saying this, he entered: she broke off, and glided past him.

It seemed as if it were her spectre that passed; for Valombrosa all aghast with the paleness and expression of her countenance, remained without the power of detaining her. "What ails the Signora!" he asked at length. He was answered by Rosalia taking his hand, and burst-

to assist each of them in their painful duty.

When Rosalia was told, that this had been the counsel of Prince Angelo Rossano, she forbore further persuasion: his opinions were sacred in her eyes; and she took the letter, from which Ippolita had read her a passage, as if she were touching the relic of a martyr. "I wish I could see this!" she said, gently sighing; "and I should like so to see Prince Angelo! Does he at all resemble Orlando?"

"Not in the least," answered Ippolita, pensively smiling with a gratified comparison of the two figures, in her silent thoughts.

"Then what *is* he like?"

"Like all the virtues!" was Ippolita's fervent answer.

"And you don't add the graces?" asked Rosalia, with that pretty playfulness which often made her brother snatch her to his breast as he would have done a de-

lightful child, and which often concealed a deep interest in the subject she seemed to sport with.

"I don't know that Prince Angelo is handsome," resumed Ippolita; "but he has the look of a Prince, and —"

"A philosopher!" interrupted Rosalia again, her spirits awakened with the joy of detaining Ippolita.

"He certainly puts on a covering of Stoicism," replied Ippolita; "but the real countenance appears so often through the transparent mask, that we are at no loss to call sensibility the characteristic of his features."

"O, then he *is* handsome!" hastily exclaimed Rosalia: but blushing a little at her own eagerness, she added, "yet what is beauty to me?"—and she returned to the subject from which they had wandered.

With tender address, Rosalia diverted her friend's attention from the agitating anxiety of the present, by inducing her to go back to former incidents of lesser in-

terest. She made her describe her emotions on entering Florence, (a city she had never seen, till she entered it an exile!) and then led her to talk of her feelings on first beholding the different monuments of her great ancestors' magnificence and public spirit; and the difficulty with which she had stifled her delight, or her anguish, when she heard the name of Medici spoken of with respect or aversion in the societies of the Palazzo Valombrosa.

Rosalia engaged her in the details of her father's mixed, and Fabio Orsini's amiably consistent character; and as the sympathising girl listened to various traits of their enduring and forgiving spirit, and to the circumstances of their untimely death, she joined her tears with those of the narrator. In discourse like this, changing their place but not their theme, now wandering under the groves of *Il bel Deserto*, and now seated in some retired apartment, the friends wore

away the hours till bed time: they separated then with mutual blessings.

Valombrosa was not returned; nor could he return till the next day; and Ippolita was thus obliged to endure the suspense of a whole sleepless, self-accusing night, ere she could learn whether Providence permitted her to remain in peace where she was, or destined her for severer trials, and new wanderings.

In the morning, when Ippolita, having met Rosalia at her chamber door, led her into the room where they were wont to meet, ere they followed Father Sordello to the chapel, they found Valombrosa, who had returned from Florence by daybreak.

"We are to retain our friend, if she will allow us," cried he, in the sweet tone of joyful confidence, as he kissed his sister's cheek.

Ippolita's face suffused with sudden crimson. She extended her hand to him, in sign of gratitude, but incapable

of utterance, left her starting tears to thank him.

Valombrosa took that extended hand —looked as if he would have pressed it to his lips; but he only bowed his head upon it, and let it go.

Rosalia threw her arms first round her friend's neck, and then round her brother's, while she besought the latter to recount the particulars of his interview with the Gonfaloniere. These were precisely such as Valombrosa had anticipated; a manly and proper consideration of Ippolita's sex, and age, and character; and the most perfect reliance upon the honour of his young countryman.

"Thus, then," added Valombrosa, "I am doubly bound to go through with my former adherence to the party which supports Soderini in his dignity as Gonfaloniere for life. He has always known that I sincerely wished for the restoration of the Medici to their rights as citizens, and to the full enjoyment of their for-

tunes. He sees the deep interest I take in the happiness of the Signora; yet does he rely on my honour as a preservative against any temptation to join those who would overthrow his authority, and give the exiled family more than their legitimate power. Hence I can never abandon him; and I must not even allow myself to envy Rossano his happy privilege of personally appearing in behalf of an oppressed man!" He sighed as he spoke.

"Do not covet *all* the good deeds that are done in the world!" exclaimed Ippolita; and she tried to smile, to diminish the force with which she uttered the words.

Valombrosa would not permit himself to thank her with a look, but his kindled cheek evinced his sensibility to the tender compliment.

Fluttered and embarrassed, he put the arm of Rosalia through his, while motioning for Ippolita to precede them;

observing that the matin bell was ringing its last round, and that Father Sordello was already in the chapel.

There, each of them poured out their different feelings at the foot of the cross: the joyfully-agitated nerves of Rosalia found composure, the troubled spirit of Ippolita comfort, and the generous soul of Valombrosa confidence of ultimate good!

When the extreme agitation of this period had subsided, Ippolita ceased to regret the facility with which she had yielded to the solicitations of her friends. Rosalia was happy almost to gaiety; and Valombrosa so religiously adhered to his engagement, that even Ippolita herself, but for his previous avowal, might now have believed he regarded her only with brotherly interest. If his eyes ever hung on her as they used to do, enamoured of every lineament and every movement of her face and figure, he studiously prevented her observation of it. It seemed

enough for him to know himself near her; to sit for hours in the same room, or under the same trees, neither attempting to engage her notice by particular attentions, nor unguarded glances.

At these times he read aloud to her and his sister; or he instructed them in the principles of some art or science newly illustrated; or he translated for them the most beautiful passages of the Greek and Latin authors; and when he discussed the subjects of their studies, he was careful to address Rosalia and Ippolita in common.

This delicate and honourable conduct quickly restored tranquillity and ease to the manners of Ippolita; and if sometimes a heavy weight would suddenly sink her heart, at the suspicion that his affection was really giving way before prudence and difficulty, she would blush at the culpable weakness, and endeavour to fortify his reasonableness (if thus rea-

sonable he were) by a greater evidence of rational feelings in herself.

Endless are the deceptions of love! Both Valombrosa and Ippolita satisfied their consciences by their mutual self-denial of all the minor enjoyments of virtuous affection: but while they rigidly forbade their eyes to speak, their actions spoke with a hundred tongues; and every wish silently anticipated, every peculiar habit favoured, every opinion adopted which belonged to each other, deepened former impressions beyond the power of time or misfortunes to erase.

Perhaps Valombrosa's spirits were less brilliantly animated than heretofore; but the shade was so soft, the effect so lovely, that Ippolita found a new charm in the temporary eclipse of that cheering brightness which was the first object of her admiration.

His anxious kindness was continually obtaining for her some little intelligence of her scattered friends; and his ready

eloquence had always some new argument with which to combat her apprehensions for her uncle Giuliano.

To that beloved uncle Ippolita's heart turned with such painful foreboding, that she was often prompted to retract all she had promised, and hasten to throw herself into the same prison. Her secret prayers, her solitary tears, were all his own: she ventured not to mingle the forbidden wishes of hopeless love with petitions so sacred. Could she have done so, at a moment like this, when that honoured uncle's life and character were at stake, she would have believed that destruction to every other hope must be the deserved punishment.

To the next dispatch from Prince Angelo, she looked for the joy of hearing that the cruel imprisonment of her uncle was near its termination. The dispatch came, and brought disappointment.

Prince Angelo had tasked all his inte-

rest at Rome for the release of Giuliano, but succeeded no farther than obtaining his Holiness's acknowledgment of di Medici's innocence, with respect to the conspiracy against his life. The suspicion of his intriguing for the return of the Bentivoglio was yet so strong in the Pope, that he refused his liberty until that faction should be entirely quelled. The Pontiff had, however, pledged his word for the safety and honourable treatment of Giuliano; and with this promise his friends were obliged to remain satisfied.

Prince Angelo had of course seen the Cardinal di Medici, and communicated to him the situation of his niece. The latter incapable from his profession of offering her an asylum with him, and secretly desirous of winning over to his party, by any means, the powerful Valori family, of which Valombrosa was the head, advised Ippolita to continue under such generous protection, and await in

peace the result of Giuliano's imprisonment. The Cardinal was himself somewhat affected in the Pontiff's favour by Giuliano's supposed delinquency, therefore durst not openly appear for his brother: but he was covertly working for him, with that address which afterwards distinguished him as Leo X.; and he desired Ippolita might be told that he had *no* doubts of ultimate success.

Rossano added to this account his intention of immediately proceeding to Bologna ere he returned to *Il bel Deserto*, for the purpose of getting this information promptly communicated to di Medici; and with such an intention his letter to Ippolita concluded. A short billet to Valombrosa, written an hour or two later, informed his friends that they must not expect him.

By a singular chance — rather, be it said, a providence — he had just learned that his misguided wife was languishing at an obscure place in Calabria, whither

she had returned from Spain with her seducer the preceding year. An ambitious marriage, made there by this man, had dissolved their guilty tie: and left without the means of life, self-deprived of friends, destitute of the consolations and the hopes of virtue, her intellect became unsettled, and she was now subsisting on the charity of the nuns of St. Ursula.

Rossano had loved this unhappy creature too fondly, to hear such tidings with the stoic firmness he would fain have persuaded Valombrosa he felt: his illegible writing, and scarcely intelligible expressions, avowed the anguish of a husband; and the blot which covered the name of Dorina, betrayed the tear that had made it.

Ere that letter could reach Tuscany, the writer would be in Calabria.

Valombrosa read this distressing billet aloud to Ippolita and Rosalia. The latter turned unusually pale, and seemed so deeply affected for their suffering friend,

that Valombrosa was uneasy at the painful excess of her pity, and gently roused her, by suggesting the satisfaction which might await Prince Angelo, in seeing his wife restored to reason, and perhaps to repentance.

"What! — would you have him receive her again?" asked Rosalia with energy, shrinking back from her brother's caressing arms, as though the idea polluted him.

"Not to his heart—not to his home!" replied Valombrosa: "the penitence of a faithless wife can never obtain for her, more than her husband's pardon. But oh! the aggravated horror of imagining the woman we have loved — I cannot imagine it!" — he cried, interrupting the progress of his own fancy. — "Surely my Rosalia, if our friend may be convinced that he has been spared an increase of shame from his wife's increase of guilt, we ought not to regret any price he may have to pay for it!"

"And if he should have the blessed

comfort of seeing her reconciled to Heaven!" added Ippolita.

"Grant it, Holy Virgin!" exclaimed Rosalia, joining her spotless hands fervently together, and looking up in a transport of pity and horror. "Alas, the poor Prince!" — and at these words she melted into tears.

Ippolita would not permit herself to dwell upon her own bitter disappointment on the present occasion: gratitude and friendship demanded all her sympathy with Prince Angelo; and seconding Valombrosa's evident wish of placing before his sister only the most consoling views of the subject under consideration, she gradually led Rosalia from the imagination of Prince Angelo's present sufferings, to that of his future peace.

"He is so worthy of happiness!" said Rosalio, while they were thus discoursing, "and now if it could be possible that his wife was not guilty — I mean if the Prince were to find out that some treachery had been employed — if the proofs of

her guilt could have been forged — we have read of such things you know — in short, if she could be proved an angel, as he once thought her, how happy might he be again! — oh, how I wish it might be so!"

"Thou dear visionary!" smiled Valombrosa, "but I fear life has no romance like that! — and even if virtue were preserved — honour once tainted, is in my mind, happiness destroyed."

"Never be thine doubted, nobly-trusting Valombrosa!" thought Ippolita; ah! never be it doubted for me or mine!" and as she concluded the inaudible apostrophe with a bursting sigh, she determined to stifle every anxiety to communicate with her uncle, rather than incur the chance of bringing Valombrosa into suspicion hereafter.

Prince Rossano was now too far removed from his friends, at *Il bel Deserto*, to receive news from him for so long a time, that they durst not calculate it. The

precarious mode of conveying letters at that period, by couriers and travellers, and the danger arising from banditti and armed bands little less lawless than they, rendered the chances much against the probability of any packet reaching its original destination.

But to all those chances, separated friends were obliged to submit, and often had to await the return of absent persons for accounts of their misfortunes or successes.

Subjects of indifferent interest may be discussed frequently, while they are pending; but such as agitate strongly, are best, and indeed most commonly, consigned after one complete discussion, to the silent meditations of each party interested in their result.

Thus, at *Il bel Deserto*, though Prince Angelo was often talked of, his present situation was never adverted to, except now and then, by the " I wish we heard

from him!" and the anxious sigh which followed the exclamation.

By degrees, the acuteness of Rosalia's pity, softened into gentle concern; and the hope of seeing him return, after all, a less unhappy man than he went, gradually stole away her sadness, and restored her gaiety.

Ippolita heard through Valombrosa's means, that her uncle was, indeed, still honourably treated at Bologna; and from the same source, she heard such favourable accounts of the increase of the Medici party in Florence, that her hopes kindled in spite of every effort to damp them.

Her half-brother, Lorenzo, had always haughtily declared, that he would never accept any terms but those which should recall him to what he called his right; the sovereignty, coupled with the restitution of family property. Giuliano had uniformly demanded only the restoration of their estates and privileges as citizens:

and that party which simply favoured his moderate wishes, joined to that which sought to gratify their secret hatred of the Gonfaloniere, by balancing against him the once-beloved and powerful di Medici, now publicly laboured to procure for Giuliano, and those of his relatives who professed to think like him, the reversal of their sentence of banishment and confiscation.

To the first class of this party, Valombrosa had avowedly belonged, ere he knew Ippolita; and though unauthorised to urge his opinions in the public deliberations of the government, his popularity and zeal, nearly weighed down the scale in their favour.

But zealous as Valombrosa was to raise the depressed di Medici, he was as earnest in convincing Ippolita that her affection had not bribed him for her kindred. Such honest patriotism might have lost him any other heart. — But Ippolita's! — how did such unswerving in-

tegrity, such nice honour, rivet that heart beyond the power of after alarms, to disunite or shake it!

Set at ease by his confidence to the Gonfaloniere, Valombrosa had no reason for wishing to seclude Ippolita; her real name was still unrevealed to all but Soderini; and her person not being likely to be recognized in Florence, he now, therefore, sought to animate the retirement of *Il bel Deserto,* which their various anxieties rendered less salutary than before, by inviting thither occasional company from the city and the adjacent villas.

Summer in its fullest glow gave facility to every plan of sylvan amusement: parties on the water; suppers in the woods by the side of some mountain-stream; concerts in the cool of evening among the groves of their fragrant gardens; the games of the peasantry witnessed, or their rustic diversions graciously shared; all of these, varied the tranquil hours at *Il bel Deserto*, and gave additional zest to

the return of those dearer and less-showy pleasures, which belong to the intimate communion of mind, taste, and feeling. In pursuits where recreation and improvement and usefulness are blended, and the sacred consciousness of advancing each other in moral acquirement, is combined with the certainty of contributing largely to each others happiness, then indeed true pleasure is the result.

To Ippolita, life so spent, was at times positivefelicity: it would have been always so, could she have silenced the just voice within her, which called on her to reflect, how selfish was the joy of thus seeing Valombrosa devoting himself to an attachment which it was so unlikely he should ever be authorised to indulge; an attachment, which by excluding every other, must doom him to a life of celibacy. Yet as circumstances compelled her to remain near him, and as she resolutely withheld from him any voluntary testimony of mutual affection, and he

never pleaded his passion, how was she culpable?

Valombrosa, indeed, never pleaded, and rarely looked his passion: but he mastered himself by the strength of hope, not of despair, as Ippolita often tried to think. He cherished the belief that the partial recal of the Medici was certain, and that a time would arrive when he should be amply repaid for this self-denial now: a time when he might sate his eyes with gazing on the face and form, from which he would never willingly withdraw them; a time when he might pour out all his soul into her answering bosom. But there were moments when the distant future, disappeared before the impatience of present wishes. He was one evening at the very point of forfeiting the promise he had given Ippolita: it was the evening of the Fast of St. Magdalen. A small party were in the house at *Il bel Deserto*, in addition to the family: it consisted of the Count

Zucharo, his wife, and Signora Anzoletta his sister. After the religious observances of the day were over, the little party restored themselves to those blameless pleasures which harmonise with our highest duties.

Having taken their early supper under the open portico, by the light of a beautiful moon, (Valombrosa was absent,) they wandered into the gardens with their lutes; each person roving at will amongst the delicious bowers, or seating themselves in the cooler grottoes, to indulge in momentary fits of musing.

When Valombrosa joined them on his return, he found the party so scattered about, that he was some time in the gardens before he discovered Ippolita. He saw her at last, seated by the side of one of the fountains, her beautiful cheek supported on her hand as she leaned upon the edge of the marble bason, with her eyes fixed upon the glancing water within.

The sultriness of the evening had induced her to unfasten the collar of her high dress, which now falling back a little open from her neck, showed the white pillar of her throat in graceful contrast with the black masses of her Cyprus ruff. A tight vest of the same mourning material, set off the exquisite symmetry and delicacy of her shape; while the same emotion which caused her heart to palpitate visibly, just tinted her crystal cheek with such celestial red as tinges a glacier at set of sun. Her eyes — those beautiful eyes — were fixed and tearful; yet the dream of love was in them; and though not directed to him, never had Valombrosa felt their power so much.

He stood a moment, drinking in, as it were, one long draught of all that love and beauty; then by a mighty effort broke the spell, withdrew his eyes, and spoke.

Ippolita started, and blushed, as though detected in some guilty thing: her

thoughts had indeed been too tenderly full of him. She stammered out a few incoherent words; while he seated himself in equal confusion, on a step of the fountain. She was rising to depart, when the sound of the Signora Anzoletta's voice at a short distance, made him motion to her not to disturb the songstress, and seemed to add a third to their party.

Something re-assured by this, Ippolita sat down again, though less from the wish to gratify him, than from inability to move. The softness of his looks; the half-sighing sound of his voice; nay, the very tremor of the hastily-extended, and as hastily-withdrawn hand with which he attempted to detain her, made her ominous of a moment which must again banish her from happiness. But the power of motion seemed suddenly taken from her; and she sunk again upon the seat, without breath to bid him leave her.

The pale moon just glimmered through the openings of some tall acacias which

overhung the fountain, and as its silver rays stole through their trembling foliage, the liquid notes of Signora Anzoletta's voice might have seemed to a fanciful ear, that of the lovely planet: but the words of her song, embodied feelings too present to the hearts of those who listened, for them to wander after fantastic imaginations.

SONG.

O fly me not! — let me but meet
  Those eyes in tearful, tender sadness;
Let me but hear those accents sweet,
  That thrill the soul to blissful madness!

Let me but think each ling'ring glance,
  Each trembling sigh, thy thoughts assign me;
And lost in Love's deceitful trance,
  I'll cease to feel, I must resign thee!

But go — and left to black despair,
  Or life, or Reason, must forsake me:
Yes — death will hear the wretch's prayer,
  And to his icy bosom take me!

As the practised songstress seemed to faulter at the commencement of the last

line, then rapidly sighed out the few words which closed it, Valombrosa no longer able to command his wish of receiving the positive assurance of that affection which might ensure him that they should meet again, even though parted hereafter, fixed his eyes upon the varying features of Ippolita. He pronounced her name in a low, trembling voice; and drew close to her as if he would have embraced her knees. Ippolita started up, and repulsing his eager movement with both her hands, fixed on him a tender, yet commanding look. "Forget yourself—and you banish me!" she cried.

Valombrosa drew back with a thrilling shiver, and she fled from him—from herself—into the deeper recesses of the garden.

In a tumult of wild emotion, at once alarmed and softened; ashamed of her weakness, and weeping over the hard destiny which forced her so to stigmatise a

virtuous affection; with a soul all full of the generous lover she was obliged to fly, she wandered far beyond the limits of the gardens, and knew not how far she had gone, till she found her way impeded, and looking up, saw herself among the woods, in front of a stranger.

"Fair lady, can you tell me which path leads *to Il bol Deserto?*" enquired the person, with an air of habitual coarse gallantry.

Ippolita drew back, and scanned him with a glance, ere she ventured to answer. As she did so, there was an expression in his roving eye, hovering between licentiousness and ferocity, which made her tremble.

She guessed not to what class of men he belonged; for though it had an air of vulgar boldness, his loosely proportioned figure was wrapped in a satin doublet once richly wrought with gold, now tarnished; a large hat but scantily-shaded by plumes of faded crimson, darkened his

sinister brows; and the mantle which he tried to fold round him, was of shrunk and discoloured velvet.

The man repeated his question in a tone which made Ippolita, though inwardly alarmed, reply firmly,—"I belong to *Il bel Deserto;* this path leads to a private entrance of the house; that to the left will conduct you round to the great gates. Good evening Signor!"

She turned as she spoke, and hastening back, through the intricate wood walks, without once stopping to look behind, regained the gardens.

The individuals she had left there, dispersed about the walks, were now gathered in a little group upon one of the terraces, where they sat full in the moonshine, looking down upon the lower range of woods waving in the night wind, and listening to detached passages from the matchless poem of Ariosto, as Count Zucharo recited them from memory.

Zucharo was one of the favoured few

to whom the poet had occasionally confided parts of his then-unfinished epic; and Ippolita who had often listened to Ariosto when at the court of Ferrara, no sooner caught the stanzas with which her ear and her heart were familiar, than as if they restored to her the friends of other days, she sunk down on the terrace in tearful pleasure.

Valombrosa, who was admiring the animated expression of his sister's countenance, anxious to atone for past indiscreet ardour by a return to calm sociability, drew near Ippolita. "I have been speculating," he said, "upon the different degrees of pleasure with which each person here, is attending to Count Zucharo. With what delight Rosalia listens! with what indifference Signora Anzoletta!—One is apt to say that beauty of every species, has only to be seen to be acknowledged: but that assuredly is not the case now, for Ariosto's poetry does not bring even a momentary

enthusiasm into those wandering eyes.— Something certainly has been left out in the pretty Signora—Is it *heart*, do you think?"

"Imagination, perhaps," observed Ippolita. "Do you not think it possible that the imagination of the reader may give charms to a book? If a narrative, or description, awakens a set of original ideas in a vivid mind, that mind will be apt to ascribe its own richness to the work which it peruses; and having itself supplied colours and expression, will deem the painting perfect. So if our imagination be dull, it blinds us to another's luminousness."

"No, no, Signora," rejoined Valombrosa, smiling. "I grant the force of your observation when applied to the mere sketch of a great writer; and I admit that a portion of the same spirit as his own in his reader will add a multitude of magic tints to the most highly-coloured composition of the poet; but for

any mind to be so tasteless as not to *see* beauties actually before them, and any heart to be so dead as not to share sympathy with the best affections and noblest impulses of our nature, is what I cannot comprehend. I guess not how such deadness to fancy and to feeling may be coupled with the power of expressing both in singing. Music is more mechanical, therefore, than I like to believe."

At this moment the lady who had suggested these remarks, changed her situation, and placed herself beside Valombrosa; the latter smiled, and turned the conversation on his sister.

He noticed her charming enthusiasm; adding, "And how well she looks, too! How lucidly fair she is! Surely such extreme fairness is an evidence of health! Come hither, my Rosalia," he cried aloud, fondly, yet sportively, putting his fingers to her slender waist, as she did so, as if trying to span it. "There! they won't

meet now! I shall have my sylph degenerate at last into a solid material body."

Rosalia gave him a reply in his own gaily-tender tone; and softly gliding from him back again to Count Zucharo, began to intreat for an abstract of Ariosto's subject.

"'Tis the spirit as well as the form of an angel!" exclaimed Ippolita, her eyes following the ethereal figure of her friend with most affectionate expressions.

"If she were not blind!" whispered Signora Anzoletta; and the half-pitying, half-scornful laugh with which she spoke, made Ippolita shrink from her in disgust.

Valombrosa, who had not overheard this whisper, turned to the murmuring sound of the Signora's lute, as she laid her fingers lightly on its harmonious chords. At his courteous request, she played and sang again; sang divinely! but she had disenchanted her voice to Ippolita's ear; and while Valombrosa

surrendered himself up to its melodious charm, she sat silent and inattentive.

The Signora was defrauded of her expected meed of praise, for ere her song was finished a page came to inform his Lord that a stranger requested an audience.

Valombrosa rose, and gaily promising to rejoin the party soon, if his visitor were not some fair lady in disguise, hastened to the house.

As his figure was now lost and now seen among the trees, Ippolita recalled the doubtful-looking personage whom she had met in the woods, and concluding that he was the stranger to whom Valombrosa was summoned, felt a throb of apprehension for his safety.

Yet what folly was this apprehension! the man indeed looked like one of desperate fortunes, but such were the very persons who would seek Valombrosa, assured of relief and counsel. Neither a robber nor an assassin would choose to

attack their victim in his own house; and if this man were neither, what was there to fear?

As Ippolita asked herself this question, Valombrosa looked back, while ascending the steps of the highest terrace: the moon shone full on his countenance. A sudden breeze wafted aside the long feather of his hat, and the clusters of his hair; and showed such a smiling light in his eyes, that Ippolita's timid thoughts melted before it. She withdrew her observation; and joining Rosalia, was soon prevailed on to join the harmony of the rest of the party, in the Evening Hymn.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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overhung a marble basin, and scented its crystal water with their blossoms.

Ippolita required a moment of strong effort to steady her voice: she said gently, "as I am not expert at making wreaths, I will content myself with plucking a sprig of myrtle for the Marquis; the plant sacred to never changing friendship."

Valombrosa looked intently upon her unsteady hand, as she was trying to break off a spray from the tree next to her; his heart was in torments: "And for whom would you gather the rose?" he asked rapidly, as he took the flower from her.

Ippolita who read the name of Rossano in his disordered eyes, averted her head, and passed from him, as though she had not heard the question.

Valombrosa half articulated some bitter exclamation, and crushing the myrtle in his hand, with a look of reviving frenzy,

started back into the cabinet of his sister.

Never had Ippolita's resolution been so violently shaken: she could not have answered Valombrosa's question, by saying "for no one," and she durst not sanction his feelings, by saying "not for Rossano." —it was however, impossible for her to endure longer, either his evident suspicion or the full reliance of his sister, without making some effort to exonerate herself; and believing herself justified in doing so, she went out to Rosalia.

"Dare I ask you, dearest friend," she said fearfully, "to continue your generous confidence in me, in spite of seeming inconsistencies! — that letter from Prince Angelo! — I hoped it would have brought me my kinsman's permission to reveal the whole of my cruel destiny to friends who have sheltered me from every evil, for these last seven months; — but it has not. My petition

to that effect had not reached his hands. Prince Rossano will I trust return with that permission; and then, O how gladly! how gratefully shall I pour out at the very feet of my forbearing friends!"—her gushing tears, and a sudden movement of the tender Rosalia, stifled her concluding words.

The tender girl threw herself upon Ippolita's neck, affectionately assuring her, that although such continued reserve might sometimes grieve both her and her brother, nothing could shake their confidence in her integrity.

Ippolita could only thank her by tears, which now flowed so fast, that it was long ere she could stay them: during their impetuous flow, her gentle supporter often increased them, by some pitying pressure, which further agitated the perturbed heart it was meant to calm.

By the time Ippolita's paroxysm was over, the trifling incident which had led to it was forgotten: they came slowly

from the terrace together, without either garland or flowers to make one, and lightly stepping into the cabinet, heard Valombrosa repeating part of a poem on which he had been vainly endeavouring to fix his attention.

He was traversing the apartment with an open book in his hand, and his back was to them when they entered; thus he did not see them while he read these lines —

I fly! — but like the stricken deer,
Who madly to the covert goes,
Bearing the arrow in his side; —
Vainly I fly! — the shaft is here:
And staunchless is the wound, which pride
Thus desperate tries, by flight to hide! —
O! will it close? —

These lines, however feebly they might paint the agonies of wounded pride, of roused jealousy, and disappointed love, were rendered powerful by the tones of Valombrosa's voice, which ever sweet and various, was now so thrillingly expressive of all these pas-

sions, that its effect was irresistible. He flung the volume from him, and turning to rush out of the room, saw Ippolita and his sister standing behind him.

An emotion of shame restored him to himself: he stammered out some incoherent phrase with an air of levity, about the exaggerated sufferings of poets; and taking down a volume of Villani, proposed reading grave history instead of sing-song.

"I had rather walk!" said his sister, gently laying her hand upon his arm.—"You know I love the peculiarly fragrant smell of the trees, and the earth after a shower: and upon the west terrace now, we are sure of a dry path:—Will you go with me Orlando?"

Valombrosa answered, by taking up his hat with one hand, and drawing her arm through his with the other. He hung back an instant!—it was but an instant—to see if Ippolita would join them; but she, penetrating her friend's amiable

anxiety to communicate what she had said, tremulously seated herself, and took up the book which Valombrosa had thrown down. His countenance then darkened again; and stung anew with mortification and jealousy, he hurried Rosalia away.

The time of their absence, and it was not a short one, was an agitating period to Ippolita: now the act was done, she feared that it was censurable.—What was the conduct which reason and integrity told her to preserve?—that which might the soonest and the surest wean Valombrosa's affections from her—that which might persuade him that his attachment was not authorized by her mutual tenderness.

But surely to do this, it was not demanded of her to act like a monster! if her own heart had never wished for more than Valombrosa's esteem, and if he had shown no warmer sentiment, what would she then have done in the present circumstances?—done, as she

was now doing, avowed her wish and her hope of being soon able to meet every inquiry of his just curiosity, with perfect confidence.

Well then, she ought not to blame herself: yet again and again she did so; repeating inwardly, "Alas! I would selfishly keep his heart, though certain such sad constancy must doom him to a joyless life; and cut him off from all the sweet ties and sacred duties of husband and of parent. Or I would doom him to share exile and poverty with me — doom him to poverty, whose wealth is the prosperity of thousands! — No, Orlando! never will I so destroy thee! — I will resign thee! — I will leave thee! — but I shall love thee still!"

Happily her mournful reveries were interrupted by the entrance of Father Sordello, Rosalia's confessor.

Although this good man always inhabited the same house with his young charge, he lived much apart, and rarely

spared any time to general society, from those hours which he employed in religious studies, pious instructions, and in discovering objects for the exercise of Valombrosa's bounty; but whenever he encountered Ippolita, her serious train of thought, and forlorn situation, beguiled him from his severer duties.

He now sat down, and entered into discourse with her, while awaiting the return of Valombrosa from his walk.

The confessor's society gradually drew Ippolita from those agitating reflections which it was impossible for her to escape from, in solitude; and by the time Valombrosa and his sister rejoined them, her countenance had resumed its wonted expression.

The first quick glance of Valombrosa's eyes, told the happy revolution of his feelings: that glance was grateful, tender, and trusting, and it seemed to beseech forgiveness for recent wrong. How touching was such a testimony of his pla-

cable and generous nature! In a moment of humour, such a being might offend; but could any one retain displeasure, when he thus avowed transgression, and sought pardon?

Ippolita, conscious that her mysterious conduct justified suspicion, longed to answer that speaking look, by one expressive of all her gratitude and admiration; but she cast down her eyes; and Valombrosa only guessed at her inward emotion, by the tremulous fluctuation of a sudden colour in her cheek.

Having immediately attended to the business of Father Sordello, and quickly dispatched it, Valombrosa gave himself up entirely to the pleasure of repairing his fault: he reverted not to what had past; but every look and word and action, was so imbued with this amiable desire, that Ippolita, while under their immediate influence, almost loved his greatest failing, since it afforded such opportunities for

the display of endearing and generous qualities.

Valombrosa did not, perhaps, deserve all the merit which Ippolita and his sister secretly gave him: for it cost him no painful struggle to testify penitence. His heart was too happy, not to pour itself out with eagerness in any way which could best show its sensibility to present blessings: and when we are happy, how good, how amiable do we become!

In describing the extreme emotion with which Ippolita had deprecated the indignation of her friends at her supposed ingratitude, Rosalia had intentionally communicated to him, her own belief that such emotion could not proceed from a feebler sentiment than that of repressed sympathy with his attachment. It seemed to him, that nothing but love could have prevented Ippolita from feeling and expressing some resentful surprise at his rude fierceness; he therefore dismissed

every apprehension of Rossano's superior influence; though he recalled with perplexity, the manner of them both, at their first meeting.

In vain did the self-dreading Ippolita shrink from his tenderness: it was too delicately pressed, too submissively enduring, for any assumed composure of her's, to check its soft advance towards former confidence. She tried to appear calmly gratified; but insensibly a more touching expression glistened in her shaded eyes, and unconscious sighs escaping at intervals, thrilled the soul of her lover.

During their long walk together, the brother and sister had talked solely of Ippolita and Rossano. The foregone conduct of each, was canvassed between them, and the conclusion drawn from it, that nothing could be more unjust, than to allow circumstances of which an explanation was promised hereafter, to

weigh down their trust in the worth and truth of two such friends.

Neither brother nor sister, though perpetually hovering round the point, spoke of Ippolita with any reference to her ever becoming more to them than she was then. Courage was wanting on both sides, to make them thus frank to each other. Yet, why Valombrosa found his voice die away when he was just going to confess, and why Rosalia should find her resolution sink the instant she wished to tax him with too tender an interest in their lovely companion, cannot well be explained. It is one of those mysteries in human nature, for which the subtlest philosopher would find it difficult to account: Yet it is one which almost every domestic circle must know by experience does exist, and often influences the conduct of its members.

Valombrosa rather wished to show than to hide his attachment from his sis-

ter; and satisfied from the tender particularity of her details about Ippolita, that she required no positive avowal of his wishes, to discover where they pointed, he contented himself with that tacit understanding, and with the most lively demonstration of gratitude for his sister's disinterestedness.

The prolonged presence of Father Sordello through this evening, assisted in bringing back the rest of the party to easy self-possession. Valombrosa delicately forbore reading any passages from Prince Angelo's letter to himself, lest that should seem to challenge an equal communicativeness on the part of Ippolita; but he introduced his name frequently into their discourse, and seemed anxious to atone for a momentary jealousy of him, by the most lavish, yet discriminating praise of his character.

From the strain of Valombrosa's conversation, Ippolita could perceive that the Prince had given him his complete confi-

dence: of course the particulars of that confidence were not repeated by his friend. But the principles on which Rossano had acted, and the wrongs he had endured, afforded his eulogist ample scope for the expression of pity and admiration.

Father Sordello warmly applauded the triumph of Christian obedience, over the natural instinct to revenge, which was manifested by Prince Angelo; and Rosalia tearfully ejaculated, at every trait of Rosano's trusting affection for his wife, "and she could betray such a husband."

CHAPTER XI.

Once more, after this dangerous evening, Ippolita sought to entrench herself behind defences of pensive reserve, and melancholy allusions to the solitary life which her fate imposed on her. Valombrosa's irrepressible affection was alarmed for an instant; but confidence of success was so natural to him who had hitherto known little else, that he only felt his hopes faulter, when Ippolita succeeded in appearing cheerfully contented with the destiny she foretold.

These doubts and fears, however, soon drew to a close. A second dispatch from Prince Angelo, containing a short letter from Giuliano di Medici, and a longer

one from himself, arrived within a very few days after his first packet.

The envelope was superscribed tot he Signora Martello, and from that circumstance Ippolita at once guessed what it contained. She was assured that Rossano would not risk the compromise of Valombrosa's fidelity to his government, by making his name the cover of a letter from one of the proscribed di Medici.

She was alone, when the important packet was brought to her by a page: her fingers rested on the seals for a few moments before she had courage to dare what was within. Now, for the first time did her heart shake at what must follow her uncle's permission to reveal her real name. To be cut off at once perhaps, from the affections of Valombrosa! how could she live under such a privation? — the loss of all she possessed on earth, friends, liberty, nay life itself, she felt would be far less dreadful to her apprehension. Yet so it ought to be!

Unable to endure this suspense, she opened her uncle's letter, and found only two hastily-written lines, impowering her to *act according to necessity and her own judgment.*

Prince Rossano's informed her, that he had with difficulty got her letter conveyed to Giuliano, by means of an inferior agent; his more powerful relative, refusing to transgress his holiness's orders, which interdicted all correspondence with the prisoner. She must therefore content herself with the very brief answer enclosed, and with his fuller details.

From these, Ippolita learnt, that furnished with the documents of di Medici's innocence, which his relative had kindly collected. Rossano was setting off for Rome, to present them himself to the Pontiff, and to enforce them with all the interest he could make in the Vatican.

"Do not thank me for this," concluded the Prince, "remember I am a

useless being, without ties to bind, or objects to endear him to any particular spot; therefore it is you who benefit me, by giving me some little opportunity of redeeming at least a few weeks, from my worthless life."

Ippolita was inexpressibly touched by the melancholy, as well as by the goodness of this sentence; and the first impulse of that gratitude, which he had forbidden, was a fervent prayer that Heaven would recompense him tenfold, in future happiness.

Her uncle's billet, she pressed to her lips and to her heart; that aching heart, where the weakness of love, and the strength of rectitude, struggled so powerfully!

The contest was long, but the victory of principle certain. Integrity had a never-failing ally in the soul of Ippolita—her piety; and seeking assistance where the proudest spirit must seek it

at last in all the great emergencies of life; she arose from her knees, strong in noble purpose.

Valombrosa had been absent for a day or two at one of his farms in the Casentino, and as he was not expected back till night, Rosalia was sure to be found alone. Ippolita now sought her; thankful that she could thus make her the medium of information to her brother, whose first feelings would consequently have had their way, before she who excited them, could be called on to witness their excess.

Rosalia saw not the smile of sad, but nearly perfect resignation, which was spread over the countenance of her friend; she was therefore unprepared for the surprise of feeling herself gently pressed in Ippolita's arms, and heard her whisper in a suppressed voice.

"I am now come, my generous Rosalia, to tell you who I am, and why I

have so long concealed that secret from you. Alas! when once I pronounce my real father's name, you will read in it my sentence of banishment from *Il bel Deserto.*

Rosalia's agitated exclamation, and inquiry were immediate; Ippolita uttered the name of Piero di Medici: Rosalia started, ejaculated a few words of surprise, then of gladness, at such conviction of the nobleness of her birth; for, far from feeling any of the anguish which racked her more experienced friend, she had to ask why she ought to feel it?

Little acquainted with public affairs, and judging all concerns by the simple laws of her own tender and upright heart, she saw no reason why the innocent daughter of their exiled Prince, should not continue to receive shelter and respect from a Florentine.

It was not till Ippolita herself, showed her the consequences of such imprudent

ing into tears. On his alarmed and repeated questions, she at last composed herself sufficiently to recapitulate all that Ippolita had just told her.

It would be difficult to describe the variety of feelings which shook the manly frame of Valombrosa during this recital. Strange to say, pleasure predominated over pain. He experienced the joy of relief from the censures of friends, and of his own habitual respect for hereditary distinction, by the knowledge of Ippolita's illustrious birth. He more than suspected that he was beloved; and consequently her guarded conduct appeared but the greater sacrifice to high-wrought principle; and he fondly fancied that his influence with the leading members of the Republic, might by discreet management, finally obtain for him the happiness of making her his own.

Meanwhile, the point he had now to gain, must be that of engaging Ippolita to remain under his sister's protection;

for to lose sight of her when she was so determinately wooed by Guidobaldo Alviano, whom he now knew to be yet alive, and to have escaped from France, was impossible. He resolved, therefore, to stifle every tender expression which might alarm her nice propriety; and to press her only in the character of disinterested friendship, with such arguments for her stay, as he believed she could not resist.

This was no time for abandonment to regrets or timid anticipations; the moment demanded prompt decisive action. Consoling Rosalia, therefore, with the prospects which inspirited himself, he hastened to give certain orders to a few trusty servants, and to make certain arrangements with Father Sordello; after which he returned to his sister's apartment.

A respectful but urgent intreaty for a short interview with Ippolita, brought her from her sad solitude.

She came! — all her pulses throbbing with a presentiment that she was about to take a last farewell of Valombrosa; yet preparing to meet the possible avowal of his passion, and the sight of his despair, by the utmost efforts of duty and determination.

What was her astonishment to see Valombrosa agitated indeed, but neither gloomy, nor frantic, nor dispossessed of himself!

It often occurs, that persons meeting under the influence of acute feelings, by coming prepared to the interview, and being earnest to conceal the violence of their emotion, go beyond the mark, and appear cold and uninterested. Thus mortification is the first effect produced on each other; and it is only by after reflection, that they come to understand the true cause of their mutual disappointment.

Ippolita, therefore, was chilled by Valombrosa's unexpected calmness, into an

air of coldness as well as resolution; and that in return distanced and disconcerted him.—Recovering this temporary embarrassment, the latter said hesitatingly,

"I hope you believe, Signora, that the name by which we are now to think of you, can only increase our respect,—our regard—our anxiety to detain you where you have so often flattered us by saying you were happy;—and if you will allow me to hope that only the most generous concern for us—that the fear of involving—"

"It is indeed the fear of involving my protectors in the fate of my unfortunate family," interrupted Ippolita, with equal embarrassment and precipitation, "which makes me now so anxious to exchange my happy refuge here, for that of a religious house. The Florentine, who knowingly shelters a Medici, is, you well know——"

"No longer, I trust, liable to confiscation and imprisonment!" interrupted

Valombrosa, his countenance expanding into its customary brightness.—"But if he were! think you Ippolita, that *I* would fail you?"

The generous tone, the generous look, the touching familiarity of expression which had escaped from his heart unawares, penetrated Ippolita: her momentarily-raised eyes poured on him their fullest flood of tender admiration, while she vehemently replied, "and think you I would not perish sooner—than—" she faultered, and subdued her voice,—"than so involve the brother of my friend?—You forget, my Lord, that it is not a common case of benevolent protection: I am sure you know that even the most noble impulses ought to yield obedience to the laws we live under."

"I had indeed forgot!" answered Valombrosa, resuming his first regulated manner; "but there cannot now be any risk of the danger you fear. As I stopt in Florence this morning, on my way

hither, I heard to my surprise, and now I rejoice in it, that Strozzi is permitted to resume his sequestered property amongst us, and that his wife returns with him."

"My sister Clarice permitted to return! the sister of Lorenzo, whose violence!"—Ippolita's amazement and joy stopped her utterance.

"Yes, dearest friend," exclaimed Rosalia, tenderly embracing her, "surely that is a proof that our government begins to feel the cruelty of punishing women for the political intrigues of men. And if you will but listen to Orlando, and consent to follow his advice, we may all be happy — happy together—still."

Ippolita pressed the hand which held her's, without speaking; and a bright crimson fixed in her cheek.

"I dare not *advise* the Signora,"—said Valombrosa, addressing his sister with that candid show of self-doubt, which sat so amiably upon him;—"I can only

tell her, what we *wish* she may think it well to act on. Your uncle's situation," he added, turning to Ippolita, "does not implicate his personal safety; — no, not at all; — but I fear his confinement may be much longer than Rossano apprehends. The matter was spoken of this morning by some of our senators, while I was with the Gonfaloniere; and they mentioned your uncle's imprisonment, as principally effected by young Lorenzo's intrigues, to keep the field of political enterprise entirely in his own hands.

"This half-brother of your's, Signora, has indeed reason to be jealous of the noble and conciliating character of your uncle."

"Alas!" cried Ippolita, "if this cruel detention has its origin in Lorenzo's machinations, my dear uncle's release is hopeless!"

"Not so!" exclaimed Valombrosa, with benevolent eagerness; — "on my life, he is released before the year ends.

Lorenzo has overshot himself. Had he confined himself to the charge of Giuliano's entering into the scheme of the Bentivoglio, for recovering their lordship of Bologna; few would have discredited the thing, and fewer blamed it: but the charge of his being one in the plot to poison his Holiness—"

"Poisoning!" repeated Ippolita, with a voice of horror. "O my uncle! we are indeed fallen, if the world attacks our last possession; thy fair fame!" She burst into tears as she spoke.

Valombrosa, who had too precipitately believed her acquainted with all the particulars of Giuliano's captivity, had now no resource, but in frankly detailing them himself; which he did: mixing his short narrative with all of comfort and encouragement which his sympathising heart could suggest.

Ippolita after the first shock, lent a willing ear to his arguments; and her reason soon admitted the preposterous-

ness of such an accusation. The complete want, not merely of proof, but of suspicious circumstances in the evidence against him, must guard her uncle's life, and preserve his honour unsullied.

Having re-assured her on this point, Valombrosa proceeded to press her gently on another. Taking the protracted detention of her uncle for granted, he urged the distracted state of all Italy at this juncture, as a reason why she ought not to place herself out of the reach of such efficient and zealous friends, as he hoped she considered him and his sister.

Foreign troops, the whole armies in short of France and Germany, were spreading confusion as they marched to the destruction of Venice. Many instances had occurred of convents having been forced, and the most shameful excesses following: who could ensure her from sharing such horrors, if she were only sheltered in a religious house, and if her fierce cousin Guidobaldo were to be again at large?

By remaining in a place of comparative security, she would not only obtain probable safety for herself, but relieve her uncle's mind from that anxiety respecting her, which Valombrosa thought must constitute the chief bitterness of his imprisonment.

From the important fact just related, of Strozzi's banishment having ceased; and from the opinions Valombrosa had heard given that morning upon the exiled family; he could not forbear urging her to hope, that the law, once so bitter against them, would be softened in favour of such individuals as were either by their sex or character entitled to such consideration.

"Both your uncle Giuliano and the Cardinal," he added, "have sought their return to Florence, by open and honourable paths. We respect them therefore; and there are many of us, that would gladly open our gates to them as fellow-citizens: but for the crafty, tricking, and

violent Lorenzo, neither as equal nor as lord, shall he ever enter Florence, while this sword and this hand can keep him out."

A momentary and noble sternness, as he uttered these words, made Ippolita see, in the as yet unpractised Valombrosa, the future patriot. And though she thought that look and that tone, ominous of disappointment to her uncle's fond hope of regaining the honours of his race with its fortune; she reverenced public spirit too sincerely, to wish it violated even for her benefit. She therefore smiled through a tear, as she replied,

"I thank you, my Lord, for this grateful tribute to my uncles; and I feel the kind force of many of your arguments. But my disturbance in a cloister, and my dear uncle's continued inability to protect me, are but doubtful; the evil I should bring upon you, certain. I *am* a Medici, and the law against harbouring us, has *not* been repealed. My sister's return is only

an exception, made in favour of an individual; and though you would generously, rashly risk ruin, for the sake of keeping your word to a dying man, I could not survive the remorse of knowing I had so repaid incalculable obligation. No, — I must go!"

"You are weary of us!" said Valombrosa hastily, and with some humour; "or a dearer object elsewhere ——."

Ippolita was on the point of uttering as hasty a denial of such a charge, when timely recollecting herself, she only turned on him a mildly-reproving look, and moved towards Rosalia.

Valombrosa followed her, submissive and repentant. "Forgive me, Signora," he cried, "my petulance is for ever crossing my better purpose. I will believe that you do indeed feel some affection for friends who — who regard you so entirely." At the word *some*, Ippolita could have spoken to him again with her soul-reaching eyes; but she kept them

down, and stifled the sigh that would fain have answered to his.

Valombrosa went on :—"If you would consent to give my sister the happiness and advantage of your society, I think there *is* a way by which all your scruples upon our account might be obviated. My kindred's politics are well known. My youth, in obedience to our laws, prevents me from having any visible share in public concerns; I am not likely, therefore, to be suspected of any treasonable view in the step I am going to propose. You tell me, Signora, that your uncle has left the secret of your name at your own discretion: would you authorise me now in confiding it to the Gonfaloniere, simply stating how you fell under my care, that you have just revealed it to me, and that in consequence of the situation of your natural guardian, I cannot allow you to quit *my* protection, and I would not clandestinely afford it? You know my disposi-

tion, Signora; concealment is abhorrent to me! therefore I wish to be open and straight forward now. If I do not obtain permission from the head of the government I am living under, from him who has authority to dispense with the rigorous enforcement of its minor enactments, though my heart will weep blood,—I must,—and I *will* allow you to go from us,—but only to a place of real safety."

"Admirable Valombrosa! dear, dear as admirable!" inwardly ejaculated Ippolita, as with silent lips but speaking eyes, she turned from the tender fixture of his.

Rosalia now laid hold of her hand, with a strength of intreaty unusual with her; and her affectionate heart uttered itself in many flattering presages of ultimate prosperity to the Medicii, from this recal of Strozzi and Clarice.

Rosalia was no politician, and she entered not into the question of which faction was right; whether that for the ex-

iled family, or that for the present popular government. She looked not beyond the limits of home; and whatever might diffuse happiness there, for that she wished, for that she hoped, and for that she would pray.

Amidst her tearful intreaties, she often mingled the name of Prince Angelo Rossano; urging the active friendship his present journey testified, as an additional reason why Ippolita should not remove from *Il bel Deserto*.

"You would not go without thanking him?" she asked. "You would not deprive yourself of the benefit of his sage counsel? O that he were here! He would convince you, though we cannot."

"His reasonings could not be more powerful than those of the Marquis," replied Ippolita, her resolution melting before the ardour of Rosalia's visionary rhetoric. "But still ——"

"Have you any repugnance to the candid step I propose?" Valombrosa ear-

nestly asked. "You may depend on the honour of the Gonfaloniere: he will rely upon mine, for what must then be submitted to; and he will therefore remain as if no such information had been given him. Even if he refuses me permission to protect you within the dominion of the republic, he will not believe himself authorised to infringe your liberty; and you will therefore have free way to go whither your cruel inclination would now lead you. — Be that where it will," he added, in a softened voice, "it will be my office to see you in safety to it."

Tears trembled in his eyes as he concluded; but, too proud to owe any thing to mere compassion, he dispersed them with a quick motion of the eyelid, and walked from her.

Ippolita's firmness was nearly vanquished. Those touching tears! — She turned deadly pale, and her limbs shook under her. "I had thought," she said, "that the mere avowal of my name

would have spared me such a struggle as this! It is bitter as death! O my friends, why do you wonder, that she who dare never be any thing to any one but those with whom her fate has been coupled from infancy, that *she* should thus combat your hearts — her own —" She interrupted herself, and added, in a hurried tone, "Allow me a moment's reflection?" As she spoke, she retreated to a recess at the lower end of the apartment, where she sunk on a seat, overpowered and exhausted.

Valombrosa followed her.

"Ippolita!" he said, in a low, determined, impassioned voice, as he took her trembling hand, "if you go to preserve my peace, it is too late, — my heart is never to be recalled! You may kill me, but you cannot cure me now."

At this unexpected avowal, Ippolita faintly ejaculated, "My Lord!"

Valombrosa went on: — "I will not hope, — I will not ask if ever you could

have loved me under happier circumstances. Let me but know you safe and tranquil — let me but see you so here, under my roof — with the sister only next to yourself in my heart — and never will I again give utterance to a passion which — never, unless happier times —"

"They will never come — they must not be dreamt of!" interrupted Ippolita, shrinking from his suddenly re-illumined look.

"Then they shall not." He cried. "Consent but to remain here, and I will consent to be to you only a friend — a brother. If you go, if I am to imagine you exposed to the dangers of your uncle, — the violence of your brother, — the tyrannical passion of that Guidobaldo, — I cannot answer for what frantic acts I may be guilty of."

"And *ought* I to stay, after this?" enquired Ippolita faintly, extricating her hand. "Oh, my Lord, could not the seeming disparity of our lot, my poverty,

the obscure name I assumed —— O too generous, too amiable Valombrosa!"

Struck with that imprudent, but indeed generous disregard of seeming inferiority, which had allowed him thus to fix his heart upon the daughter of the humble Martello, Ippolita was no longer able to combat her tenderness; she dissolved into tears; and her hand yielded to the trembling, ardent, yet respectful pressure of his.

Valombrosa molded that soft hand in repeated pressures; accompanying each, with a sigh of impatient tenderness; tenderness impatient of the restraint he was determined to impose on it: but he urged his love no further.

"I have promised!" he said, after a long struggle, —"I have promised, Ippolita, and I speak of love no more — never till you may listen to me. Only consent to the trial I wish to make of retaining you here with the permission of the Gonfaloniere. When your uncles can claim you,

or when I break my vow of silence on one subject, then quit me."

Perhaps Ippolita had gone as far as it is possible for human nature to go in such circumstances; to make the sacrifice of all its hopes and wishes, of all its happiness, nay of life itself, for the peace or honour of a beloved object, is part of love's heroism: that heroism will even stretch so far as the resolution of making the sacrifice unrevealed. But is there a heart which has strength to perfect such heroic resolution? The man who would not at such a moment avow the sacrifice he was making, and the woman who could entirely conceal that it was one, must either mistake flattered vanity for love, or be more than human. On the present occasion a change of circumstances seemed to Ippolita's confused faculties, to justify a change of conduct; the unexpected favour shown one part of her family, might reasonably be expected to extend soon to the others; and if it were

made no longer criminal in Florence for one of its citizens to receive the exiled di Medici, if the revenues and lands of that now destitute race were to be restored to them even in part, the object of Valombrosa's attachment might hereafter bestow herself upon him, without fear of carrying destruction to his arms.

Gratitude, and pity too, pleaded for her stay. Rosalia would be so bereaved; she would refuse comfort; and all that little bank of health to which her brother had been daily adding, with the fondest attention, would probably sink, at least for a while, under the excess of her regret. It was but for a short period also, that Ippolita need remain: her uncle's freedom would be the instant call for her departure; and if meanwhile, Valombrosa should break his contract of addressing her merely as a friend, she was authorised to withdraw from his protection.

These were the arguments with which Ippolita thought her reason combated her

self-sacrifice, and assisted the pleading of Valombrosa. Alas, poor Ippolita! it was thy heart not thy reason which spoke, and prompted thee to faulter out those few words of acquiescence, for which Valombrosa panted!

No sooner were they uttered, than starting up, and fervently kissing her hand, he disappeared with the quickness of light.

CHAPTER XII.

"O, MY Rosalia, what have I done?" asked Ippolita, as she saw him vanish; all the consequences of her weakness rushing upon her at once.

Directed by the sound of her voice, Rosalia glided to her side; her anxious question opened the flood-gates of Ippolita's repressed heart, and falling upon her young companion's neck, she gave the torrent way.

Rosalia repaid that just confidence, by every expression of affectionate sympathy, and many a fond augury of future happiness for her; and she promised to keep the secret of Ippolita's too tender sense of her lover's merits, though she would

not admit the necessity for such cruel precaution. But Rosalia was young enough to believe, that because certain events would be the most harmonious with her wishes, they must necessarily happen; and Ippolita had lived that little longer, which teaches, that "the course of *this world* never doth run smooth;" that life, in short, is a tangled skein, which rarely winds easily. She now besought her friend never more to revert to the culpable weakness she had just avowed; since she had owned it, simply from the belief that such perfect confidence was demanded by honour and friendship. The same principles would call on her to conquer that weakness, and to resist every temptation to the encouragement of hope in Valombrosa: she therefore determined henceforth to speak and act as if no such sentiment had been confessed, either by herself, or by him; and it must be the kindly task of Rosalia,